NATURAL HISTORY OF ENTHUSIASM.

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NATURAL HISTORY

OF

ENTHUSIASM.

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το δ' ἡ ΚΥΡΙΑ

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The belief that a bright era of renovation, and union, and extension, presently awaits the Christian Church, seems to be very generally entertained. The writer of this volume participates in the cheering hope; and it has impelled him to undertake the difficult task of describing, under its various forms, that FICTITIOUS PIETY which hitherto has never failed to appear in times of unusual religious excitement, and which may be anticipated as the probable attendant of a new developement of the powers of Christianity.

But while it has been the writer's principal aim to present before the Christian reader, in as distinct a manner as possible, the characters of that perilous illusion which too often supplants genuine piety, he has also endeavoured so to fix the sense of the term—Enthusiasm, as to wrest it from those who misuse it to their own infinite damage.

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NATURAL HISTORY OF ENTHUSIASM.

SECTION I.

ENTHUSIASM, SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS.

SOME form of beauty, engendered by the imagination, or some semblance of dignity or grace, invests almost every object that excites desire. These illusions—if indeed they ought to be called illusions, serve the purpose of blending the incongruous materials of human nature, and by mediating between body and spirit, reconcile the animal and intellectual propensities, and give dignity and harmony to the character of man. By these unsubstantial impressions it is that the social affections are enriched and enlivened; by these, not less than by the superiority of the reasoning faculties, mankind is elevated above the brute; and it is these, as the germinating principles of all improvement and refinement, that distinguish civilized from savage life.

The constitutional difference between one man and another is to be traced, in great measure, to the quality and vigour of the imagination. Thus it will be found that eminently active and energetic spirits are peculiarly susceptible to those natural exaggerations, by which the mind enhances the value of whatever it pursues. At the same time an efficient energy always implies the power of control over such impressions. Yet it is enough that these creations of fancy should be under the command of reason; for good sense by no means demands a rigid scrutiny into the composition or mechanism of common motives, or asks that whatever is not absolutely substantial in the objects of desire should be spurned. He who is not too wise to be happy, leaves the machinery of human nature to accomplish its revolutions unexplored, and is content to hold the mastery over its movements. Whoever, instead of simply repressing the irregularities of the imagination, and forbidding its predominance, would altogether exclude its influence, must either sink far below the common level of humanity, or rise much above it.

The excesses of the imagination are of two kinds; the first is when, *within its proper sphere*, it gains so great a power that all other affections and motives belonging to human nature are overborne and excluded. It is thus that intellectual or professional pursuits seem sometimes to annihilate all sympathy with the common

interests of life, and to render a man a mere phantom, except within the particular circle of his favourite objects.

The second kind of excess, one species of which forms the subject of the present work, is of much more evil tendency, and consists in a trespass of the imagination upon ground where it should have little or no influence, and where it can only prevent or disturb the operation of reason and right feeling. Thus, not seldom, it is seen that, on the walks of common life, the sobrieties of good sense, and the counsels of experience, and the obvious motives of interest; and perhaps even the dictates of rectitude, are set at nought by some fiction of an exorbitant imagination, which overstepping its proper function, invests even the most ordinary objects, either with preposterous charms or with unreal deformities.

Very few minds, perhaps, are altogether free from such constitutional errors of the intellectual sight, which, to a greater or less extent, intercept our view of things as they are. And from the same cause it is that we so greatly miscalculate the amount of happiness or of suffering that belongs to the lot of those around us; which happens, not so much because their actual circumstances are unknown, as because their habitual illusions are not perceived by us. And if that colouring medium through which every man contemplates his own condition were exposed to the eyes of others, the victims of calamity might

sometimes be envied; and often would the favourites of fortune become the objects of pity. Or if every one were in a moment to be disenchanted of whatever is ideal in his permanent sensations, every one would think himself at once much less happy, and much more so than he had hitherto supposed.

The force and extravagance of the imagination is in some constitutions so great, that it admits of no correction from even the severest lessons of experience, much less from the advices of wisdom:---The enthusiast passes through life in a sort of happy somnambulency—smiling and dreaming as he goes, unconscious of whatever is real, and busy with whatever is fantastic:—now he treads with naked foot on thorns; now plunges through depths; now verges the precipice, and always preserves the same impassible serenity, and displays the same reckless hardihood.

But if the predominance of the imagination do not approach quite so near to the limits of insanity—if it admit of correction, then, the many checks and reverses which belong to the common course of human life, usually fray it away from present scenes, and either send it back in pensive recollections of past pleasures, or forwards in anticipation of a bright futurity. The former is of the two the safer kind of constitutional error; for as the objects upon which the imagination fixes its gaze remain always unchanged, they impart a sort of tranquillity to the mind, and even favour

its converse with wisdom; but the latter being variable, and altogether under the command of the inventive faculty, bring with them perpetual agitations, and continually create new excitements. Besides; as these egregious hopes come in their turn to be dispelled by realities, the fond pensioner upon futurity lives amid the vexations of one who believes himself always plundered; for each day as it comes robs him of what he had called his own. Thus the real ills of life pierce the heart with a double edge.

The propensity of a disordered imagination to find, or to create, some region of fictitious happiness, leads not a few to betake themselves to the fields of intellectual enjoyment, where they may be exempt from the annoyances that infest the lower world. Hence it is that the walks of natural philosophy or abstract science, and of literature, and especially of poetry and the fine arts, are frequented by many who addict themselves to pursuits of this kind, not so much from the genuine impulse of native genius or taste, as from a yearning desire to discover some paradise of delights, where no croaking voice of disappointment is heard, and where adversity has no range or leave of entrance. These intruders upon the realms of philosophy—these *refugees* from the vexations of common life, as they are in quest merely of solace and diversion, do not often become effective labourers in the departments upon which they enter: their motive possesses

not the vigour necessary for continued and productive toil. Or if a degree of ambition happens to be conjoined with the feeble ardour of the mind, it renders them empirics in science, or schemers in mechanics; or they essay their ineptitude upon some gaudy or preposterous extravagance of verse or picture; or perhaps spend their days in loading folios, shelves and glass-cases with curious lumber of whatever kind most completely unites the qualities of rarity and worthlessness.

Nature has furnished each of the active faculties with a sensibility to pleasure in its own exercise: this sensibility is the spring of spontaneous exertion; and if the intellectual constitution be robust, it serves to stimulate labour, and yet itself observes a modest sobriety, leaving the forces of the mind to do their part without embarrassment. The pleasurable emotion is always subordinate and subservient, never predominant or importunate. But in minds of a less healthy temperament, the emotion of pleasure and the consequent excitement is disproportionate to the strength of the faculties. The efficient power of the understanding is therefore overborne, and left in the rear; there is more of commotion than of action; more of movement than of progress; more of enterprise than of achievement.

Such then are those who, in due regard both to the essential differences of character, and to the proprieties of language, should be termed Enthusiasts. To apply an epithet which carries

with it an idea of folly, of weakness, and of extravagance, to a vigorous mind, efficiently as well as ardently engaged in the pursuit of any substantial and important object, is not merely to misuse a word, but to introduce confusion among our notions, and to put contempt upon what is deserving of respect. Where there is no error of imagination—no misjudging of realities—no calculations which reason condemns, there is no enthusiasm, even though the soul may be on fire with the velocity of its movement in pursuit of its chosen object. If once we abandon this distinction, language will want a term for a well-known and very common vice of the mind; and, from a wasteful perversion of phrases, we must be reduced to speak of qualities most noble and most base by the very same designation. If the objects which excite the ardour of the mind are substantial, and if the mode of pursuit be truly conducive to their attainment;—if, in a word, all be real and genuine, then it is not one degree more, or even many degrees more, of intensity of feeling that can alter the character of the emotion. Enthusiasm is not a term of *measurement*, but of *quality*.

When it is said that enthusiasm is the fault of infirm constitutions, a seeming exception must be made in behalf of a few high-tempered spirits, distinguished by their indefatigable energy, and destined to achieve arduous and hazardous enterprises. That such spirits often exhibit the

characters of enthusiasm cannot be denied; for the imagination spurns restraint, and rejects all the sober measurements and calculations of reason whenever its chosen object is in view; and a tinge, often more than a tinge, of extravagance belongs to every word and action. And yet the exception is only apparent; for though these giants of human nature greatly surpass other men in force of mind, and courage, and activity, still the heroic extravagance, and the irregular and ungovernable power, which enables them to dare and to do so much, is, in fact, nothing more than a partial accumulation of strength, necessary because the utmost energies of human nature are so small, that, if equally distributed through the system, they would be inadequate to arduous labours. The very same task, which the human hero achieves in the fury and fever of a half-mad enthusiasm, would be performed by a seraph in the perfect serenity of reason. Although therefore these vigorous minds are strong when placed in comparison with others, their enthusiasm is in itself a weakness;—a weakness of the *species*, if not of the individual.

Unless a perpetual miracle were to intercept the natural operation of common causes, religion, not less than philosophy or poetry, will draw enthusiasts within its precincts. Nor, if we recollect on the one hand the fitness of the vast objects revealed in the Scriptures to affect the imagination, and on the other the wide diffusion

of religious ideas, can it seem strange if it be found, in fact, that religious enthusiasts outnumber any other class. It is also quite natural that enthusiastic and genuine religious emotions should be intermingled with peculiar intricacy, since the revelations which give them scope combine, in a peculiar manner, elements of grandeur, of power, and of sublimity, fitted to kindle the imagination, with those ideas that furnish excitement to the moral sentiments.

The religion of the heart, it is manifest, may be supplanted by a religion of the imagination, just in the same way that the social affections are often dislodged or corrupted by factitious sensibilities. Every one knows that an artificial excitement of all the kind and tender emotions of our nature may take place through the medium of the imagination. Hence the power of poetry and the drama. But every one must also know that these feelings, how vivid soever and seemingly pure and salutary they may be, and however nearly they may resemble the genuine workings of the soul, are so far from producing the same softening effect upon the character, that they tend rather to indurate the heart. Whenever excitements of any kind are regarded distinctly as a source of luxurious pleasure, then, instead of expanding the bosom with beneficent energy, instead of dispelling the sinister purposes of selfishness, instead of shedding the softness and warmth of generous love through the moral system, they

become a freezing centre of solitary and unsocial indulgence; and at length displace every emotion that deserves to be called virtuous. No cloak of selfishness is in fact more impenetrable than that which usually envelops a pampered imagination. The reality of woe is the very circumstance that paralyses sympathy; and the eyes that can pour forth their floods of commiseration for the sorrows of the romance or the drama, grudge a tear to the substantial wretchedness of the unhappy. Much more often than not, this kind of luxurious sensitiveness to fiction is conjoined with a callousness that enables the subject of it to pass through the affecting occasions of domestic life in immovable apathy:—the heart has become, like that of leviathan, "firm as a stone—yea, hard as a piece of the nether millstone."

This process of perversion and of induration may as readily have place among the religious emotions as among those of any other class; for the laws of human nature are uniform, whatever may be the immediate cause which puts them in action; and a fictitious piety corrupts or petrifies the heart not less certainly than does a romantic sentimentality. The danger attending enthusiasm in religion is not then of a trivial sort; and whoever disaffects the substantial matters of Christianity, and seeks to derive from it merely, or chiefly, the gratifications of excited feeling;—whoever combines from its materials a paradise of abstract contemplation, or of poetic imagery,

where he may take refuge from the annoyances and the importunate claims of common life;—whoever thus delights himself with dreams, and is insensible to realities, lives in peril of awaking from his illusions when truth comes too late. The religious idealist, perhaps, sincerely believes himself to be eminently devout; and those who witness his abstraction, his elevation, his enjoyments, may reverence his piety; meanwhile this fictitious happiness creeps as a lethargy through the moral system, and is rendering him continually less and less susceptible of those emotions in which true religion consists.

Nor is this always the limit of the evil; for though religious enthusiasm may sometimes seem a harmless delusion, compatible with amiable feelings and virtuous conduct, it more often allies itself with the malign passions, and then produces the virulent mischiefs of fanaticism. Opportunity may be wanting, and habit may be wanting, but intrinsic qualification for the perpetration of the worst crimes is not wanting to the man whose bosom heaves with religious enthusiasm, inflamed by malignancy. If checks are removed, if incitements are presented, if the momentum of action and custom is acquired, he will soon learn to contemn every emotion of kindness or of pity, as if it were a treason against heaven; and will make it his ambition to rival the achievements, not of heroes, but of fiends. The amenities that have been diffused through society in modern times

forbid the overt acts and excesses of fanatical feeling; but the venom still lurks in the vicinity of enthusiasm, and may be quickened in a moment; meantime, while smothered and repressed, it gives edge and spirit to those hundred religious differences which are still the opprobrium of Christianity. Whoever then admits into his bosom the artificial fire of an imaginative piety, ought first to assure himself that his heart harbours no particle of the poison of ill-will.

The reproach so eagerly propagated by those who make no religious pretensions, against those who do—that their godliness serves them as a cloak of immorality, is, to a great extent, calumnious: it is also in some measure founded upon facts, which, though misunderstood and exaggerated, give colour to the charge. When professors of religion are suddenly found to be wanting in common integrity, or in personal virtue, no other supposition is admitted by the world than that the delinquent was always a hypocrite; and this supposition is, no doubt, sometimes not erroneous. But much more often his fall has surprised himself, not less than others; and is, in fact, nothing more than the natural issue of a fictitious piety, which, though it might hold itself entire under ordinary circumstances, gave way necessarily in the hour of unusual trial. An artificial religion not only fails to impart to the mind the vigour and consistency of true virtue,

but withdraws attention from those common principles of honour and integrity which carry worldly men with credit through difficult occasions. The enthusiast is, therefore, of all men the one who is the worst prepared to withstand peculiar seductions.—He possesses neither the heavenly armour of virtue, nor the earthly.

It were an affront to reason, as well as to theology, to suppose that true and universal virtue can rest on any other foundation than the fear and love of God. The enthusiast, therefore, whose piety is fictitious, has only a choice of immoralities, to be determined by his temperament and circumstances. He may become, perhaps, nothing worse than a recluse—a lazy contemplatist, and intellectual voluptuary, shut up from his fellows in the circle of profitless spiritual delights and conflicts. The times are indeed gone by when persons of this class might, in contempt of their species, and in idolatry of themselves, withdraw to dens, and hold society only with bats, and make the supreme wisdom to consist in the possession of a long beard, a filthy blanket, and a taste for raw herbs: but the same tastes, animated by the same principles, fail not still to find place of indulgence, even amid the crowds of a city: and the recluse who lives in the world will, probably, be more sour in temper than the anchoret of the wilderness. An ardent temperament converts the enthusiast into a zealot, who, while he is laborious in winning

proselytes, discharges common duties very remissly, and is found to be a more punctilious observer of his creed, than of his word. Or, if his imagination be fertile, he becomes a visionary, who lives on better terms with angels and with seraphs, than with his children, servants, and neighbours: or he is one who, while he reverences the "thrones, dominions and powers" of the invisible world, vents his spleen in railing at all "dignities and powers" of earth.

Superstition—the creature of guilt and fear, is an evil almost as ancient as the human family. But Enthusiasm, the child of hope, hardly appeared on earth until after the time when life and immortality had been brought to light by Christianity. Hitherto, a cloud of the thickest gloom had stretched itself out before the eye of man as he trod the sad path to the grave; and though poetry supplied its fictions, and philosophy its surmises, the one possessed little force, and the other could claim no authentication; and therefore neither had power to awaken the soul. But the Christian revelation not only shed a sudden splendour upon the awful futurity, but brought its revelations to bear upon the minds of men with all the pressure and intensity of palpable facts. The long slumbering sentiment of immortal hope—a sentiment natural to the human constitution, and chief among its passions, instead of being deluded, as heretofore, by dreams, was

thoroughly aroused by the hand and voice of reality; and human nature exhibited a new developement of the higher faculties. When therefore, in the second century of the Christian era, various and vigorous forms of an enthusiasm—such as the world had hitherto never known, are seen to start forth on the stage of history, we behold the indications of the presence of Truth, giving an impulse to the human mind—both for the better and the worse—which no fictions of sages or poets had ever imparted.

In proportion as the influence of Scriptural religion faded, the elder and the younger vice—Superstition and Enthusiasm, joined their forces to deform every principle and practice of Christianity, and in the course of four or five centuries, under their united operation, a faint semblance only of its primeval beauty survived; another period of five hundred years saw Superstition prevail, almost to the extinction, not only of true religion, but of enthusiasm also; and mankind fell back into a gloom as thick as that of the ancient polytheism. But at length the breath of life returned to the prostrate church, and the accumulated and consolidated evils of many ages were thrown off in a day. Yet as Superstition more than Enthusiasm had spoiled Christianity, she, chiefly, was recognized as the enemy of religion; and the latter, rather than the former, was allowed to hold a place in the sanctuary after its cleansing. Since that happy period of

refreshment and renovation, both vices have had their seasons of recovered influence; but both have been held in check, and their prevalence effectually prevented. At the present time—we speak of protestant christendom, the power of superstition is exceedingly small; for the diffusion of general knowledge, and the prevalence of true religion, and not less, the influence of the infidel spirit, forbid the advances of an error which must always lean for support on ignorance and fear. Nor, on the other hand, can it be fairly affirmed that ours is eminently or conspicuously an age of religious enthusiasm. Yet as there are superstitions which still maintain a feeble existence under favour of the respect naturally paid to antiquity; so are there also among us enthusiastic principles and practices, which, having been generated in a period of greater excitement than our own, are preserved as they were received from "the fathers;" and seem to be in safe course of tradition to the next generation.

But even if it should appear that—excepting individual instances of constitutional extravagance, which it would be absurd, because useless, to make the subject of serious animadversion—enthusiasm is not now justly chargeable upon any body of Christians, there would still be a very sufficient reason for attempting to fix the true import of the term, so long as it is vaguely and contumeliously applied by many to every degree of fervour in religion which seems to

condemn their own indifference. Not indeed as if there were ground to hope that even the most exact and unexceptionable analysis, or the clearest definitions, would ever avail so to distinguish genuine from spurious piety as should compel irreligious men to acknowledge that the difference is real; for such persons feel it to be indispensable to the slumber of conscience to confound the one with the other: and though a thousand times refuted, they will again, when pressed by truth and reason, run to the old and crazy sophism, which pretends that because Christianity is sometimes disfigured by enthusiasts and fanatics, therefore there is neither retribution nor immortality for man.—It is the infatuation of persons of a certain character to live always at variance with wisdom on account of other men's follies; and this is the deplorable error of those who will see nothing in religion but its corruptions. Nevertheless truth owes always a vindication of herself to her friends, if not to her enemies; and her sincere friends will not wish to screen their own errors when this vindication requires them to be exposed.

If, as is implied in some common modes of speaking, enthusiasm were only an error of *degree*—a mere fault by excess, then the attempt to establish a definite distinction between what is blameworthy and what is commendable in the religious affections—between the *maximum* and *minimum* of emotion which sobriety approves,

must be both hopeless and fruitless; because we should need a scale adapted to every man's constitution; for the very same amount of fervour which may be only natural and proper to one mind, could not be attained by another without delirium or insanity; and if this notion were just, every one would be entitled to repel the charge of either apathy or enthusiasm; and while one might maintain, that if he were to admit into his bosom a single degree more of religious fervour than he actually feels, *he* should become an enthusiast, another might offer an equally reasonable apology for the wildest extravagances. At this rate the real offenders against sober piety could never be convicted of their fault; and in allowing such a principle we should only authenticate the scorn with which indifference loves to look upon sincerity.

That the error of the enthusiast does not consist in an *excess* merely of the religious emotions, might be argued conclusively on the ground that the Scriptures—our only safe guide on such points—while they are replete with the language of empassioned devotion, and while they contain a multitude of urgent and explicit exhortations, tending to stimulate the fervency of prayer, offer no cautions against any such supposed excesses of piety.

But, as matter of fact, nothing is more common than to meet with religionists whose opinions and language are manifestly deformed by enthusiasm, while their devotional feelings are barely tepid:—

languor, relaxation, apathy, not less than extravagance, characterise their style of piety; and it were quite a ludicrous mistake to warn such persons of the danger of being "religious overmuch." Yet it must be granted that those extremes in matters of opinion or practice, which sometimes render even torpor conspicuous by its absurdities, have always originated with minds susceptible of high excitement. Enthusiasm, in a concrete form, is the child of vivacious temperaments; but when once produced, it spreads almost as readily through inert, as through active masses, and shows itself to be altogether separable from the ardour or turbulence whence it sprang.

To depict the character of those who are enthusiasts by *physical temperament*, is then a matter of much less importance than to define the errors which such persons propagate; for, in the first place, the originators of enthusiasm are few, and the parties infected by it many; and, in the second, the evil with the latter is incidental, and, therefore, may be remedied; while with the former, as it is constitutional, it is hardly in any degree susceptible of correction.

The examination of a few principal points will make it evident that a very intelligible distinction may, without difficulty, be established between what is genuine and what is spurious in religious feeling; and when an object so important is before us, we ought not to heed the injudicious,

and perhaps sinister, delicacy of some persons who had rather that truth should remain for ever sullied by corruptions, and exposed to the contempt of worldlings, than that themselves should be disturbed in their narrow and long-cherished modes of thinking. And yet there are some lesser misconceptions which, perhaps, it is more wise to leave untouched, than to attempt to correct them at the cost of breaking up habits of thought and modes of speaking which have connected themselves indissolubly with truths of vital importance. It should also be granted, that when those explanations or illustrations of momentous doctrines, which an exposure of the error of the enthusiast may lead us to propound, seem at all to endanger the simplicity of our reliance upon the inartificial declarations of Scripture, they are much better abandoned at once—though in themselves, perhaps, justifiable—than maintained, if in doing so we are seduced from the direct light of revelation into the dim regions of philosophical abstraction.

Christianity has in some short periods of its history been entirely dissociated from philosophical modes of thought and expression; and assuredly it has prospered in such periods. At other times it has scarcely been seen at all, except in the garb of metaphysical discussion, and then it has lost all its vigour and glory. In the present state of the world the primitive insulation of religious truth from the philosophical style is scarcely practicable; nor indeed does it seem so desirable while, hap-

pily, we are in no danger of seeing the light of revelation again immured in colleges. But although it is inevitable—and perhaps not to be regretted—that religious subjects, both doctrinal and practical, should, especially in books, admit such generalities, every sober-minded writer will remember that it is not by an intrinsic and permanent necessity, but by a temporary concession to the spirit of the age, that this style is used and allowed. He will, moreover bear in mind that the concession leans towards a side of danger, and will, therefore, always hold himself ready to break off from even the most pleasing or plausible speculation, when his Christian instincts—if the phrase may be permitted, give him warning that he is going remote from the vital atmosphere of scriptural truth. Whatever is practically important in religion or morals may at all times be advanced and argued in the simplest terms of colloquial expression. From the pulpit, perhaps, no other style should at any time be heard; for the pulpit belongs to the poor and to the uninstructed. But the press is not bound by the same conditions, for it is an instrument of knowledge foreign to the authenticated means of Christian instruction. A writer and a layman is no recognized functionary in the Church; he may, therefore, choose his style without violating any rules or proprieties of office.*

* Strongly feeling the *practical* importance of the subject he has undertaken to treat, the Author designedly abstained from those

abtruse disquisitions which, though they fell naturally in his way, would, if admitted, have given a scientific rather than an ethical character to the essay; and so would not merely have repelled the generality of readers, but have favoured a notion he deems highly pernicious—namely, that momentous questions of religious sentiment and conduct in which the peasant and the sage have an equal concern, cannot be separated from certain metaphysical profundities; or that it cannot be known whether a man is on the road to heaven or not, without the aid of dialectics. Morals and theology have already suffered more than enough from this absurd and dangerous supposition: the Author would shudder to be implicated in the guilt of seeming to favour so great an error. Nevertheless, as he finds that some have wished that he had adjusted his style to the niceties of the modern metaphysics, he is willing, in some degree, to supply what has been deemed a defect; but, for the reason just stated, he declines to insert what he has to say of this sort in the text.

The Author must avow that he regards what is called "the Science of Mind" as little more than an affair of definitions and of phrases: an affair, indeed, which has its importance, but an importance vastly overrated (generally) by those who take rank in the republic of letters as professors of that science. Who would not wish to employ language always with the utmost precision of which it is capable? and if certain vulgar phrases, such as "the affections of the heart—the powers of the imagination—the faculties of reason, &c." are found to convey erroneous notions, by all means let them be exchanged for expressions less vague and delusive. But alas! unless the mass of mankind could be induced to *think* always with philosophical precision, and to speak always with scientific care, the new terms with which we may displace the old ones, will no sooner have become current than they, like their predecessors, will acquire manifold incrustrations of error, and will thus, in their turn, lie open to the animadversions of the next generation of metaphysical reformists. Every phrase used to convey notions of the mind, and of its operations, may be regarded as an algebraic sign, representing just so much of exact truth as the mind which employs or which receives it, is already possessed of, or is capable of admitting. He who is accustomed to analyse profoundly and perfectly the machinery and the working of his own mind, will suffer extremely little disadvantage, though he should adhere to old-fashioned phrases. On the other hand, those whom nature has not gifted to descend into the abysses of the intellectual system, will gain from "a new and unexceptionable nomenclature" very little, unless it be the proposterous conceit that they

have learned to think more justly than Aristotle, Bacon, Leibnitz, and Locke.

This premised, the Author would explain himself as follows. He thinks that much of the philosophy of human nature lies in the doctrine of the capability of the mind to exist in a compound state. Waving the futile question, whether we can, in fact, entertain more thoughts than one at a time, a question not much more important than that discussed so seriously in the schools,—"How many angels may stand at the same moment on the point of a needle"—it is manifest that throughout one and the same *mental era*, if the phrase may be admitted, several distinguishable classes of thought or emotion may coexist, and may mutually influence each other. Thus, for instance, the mind may rationate continuously in working a mathematical problem, and, throughout the same period, delectate in the perception of the high relations of number and figure; and may also, through the same period, glow with emotions of personal ambition in the hope of achieving some important advancement of science. Or a musical performer may, without a conscious cessation, execute a complex succession of sounds, and—exult in the admiration he excites, and — revel in the direct pleasures of harmony. Instances of this sort need not be multiplied; and if it be affirmed that these several classes of mental movement are not actually contemporaneous, but only seemingly so, our inferences remain unaffected. The Author thinks, then, that a healthful and vigorous mind is one that is susceptible of much of this complex movement; and not only so, but capable of regulating such movements, and of holding them in their due respective proportions of intensity, so that the active and productive powers may work at ease. A feeble or impaired mind, on the contrary, is one which is naturally incapable, in any great degree, of complexity, or of controlling more movements than one. Such a mind will therefore habitually fall a prey to some kind of delectation, or to some emotion that is constitutionally imperious. If the animal appetites or the passions are supreme, the character becomes ungovernably sensual or impetuous (in its peculiar manner). But if the susceptibility to intellectual delectation;—or, in other words, the imagination, rules the constitution, then the individual becomes, in his line—an enthusiast. Ideas of beauty, greatness, terror, heroism, &c. will prevail over those emotions of love or aversion, of fear, hope, contrition, and so forth, which are called for by the occasion. A sound mind feels and acts according to the position in which it perceives itself to be placed. But the enthusiast, blind to his real position, pleases himself with such elements as

it may afford of imaginative excitement. The enthusiast is the spectator of the scene in the centre of which he stands; not the party primarily interested; and the changing emotions of his mind are *semblances* only of those which should govern him. Religious enthusiasm, in *this* sense of the term, is manifestly a most perilous counterfeit. If Christianity be admitted as true, then it follows that every rational being is not only related to the Creator, as the recipient of life and its benefits, but accountable also to the same awful Being as Governor of the universe, whom he is bound, by the immovable condition of existence, to love supremely, and to obey implicitly. But in fact man has lapsed from this *natural* condition of love and obedience;—has personally and freely run athwart the eternal principles of virtue: and in consequence of this loss of goodness, has at once lost happiness, and placed himself beneath the penal consequences of sin. Yet, though thus fearfully placed, he is invited to reconciliation, and the path of return to virtue and happiness is open before him. Now all this, though matter of momentous concernment to every human being, may offer itself to the mind (so long at least as no sensible demonstration of the reality of unseen things is perceived) as the materials of delectation, in virtue of its qualities of moral beauty, or of sublimity, or terror, or dramatic or poetic interest. These objects, while thus *indirectly* contemplated, may excite in *semblance*, every emotion which a direct perception of the same facts, produces in a sane mind. Thus the whole pathology of piety may rise upon the surface of the mind, though nothing of its substance exists beneath.

If it be asked—But who then shall certainly know whether his religious emotions—his joy, his love, his hope, his penitence, are genuine and direct, or illusory and unreal?—it is replied, that though common sense, if it existed in any degree of vigour, would never be perplexed in distinguishing between the flimsiness of enthusiasm and the force and solidity of genuine piety; yet is it safer to refer at once to the one infallible criterion—the only criterion recommended to our use in the Scripture—the only criterion to be appealed to at the awful tribunal of the Righteous Judge— namely, the influence of religious motives upon the temper, conversation, and conduct. On every occasion throughout the essay, the Author has laboured to direct his reader's attention to this legitimate means of distinguishing the true from the false in matters of religion. Better and more available is *this* means of discrimination than volumes of theologico-metaphysical analysis.

SECTION II.

ENTHUSIASM IN DEVOTION.

The most formal and lifeless devotions, not less than the most fervent, are mere enthusiasm, unless it be ascertained, on satisfactory grounds, that such exercises are indeed efficient means for promoting our welfare. Prayer is impiety, and praise a folly, if the one be not a real instrument of obtaining important benefits, and the other an authorised and acceptable offering to the Giver of all good. But when once these points are determined—and they are necessarily involved in the truth of Christianity—then, whatever improprieties may be chargeable upon the devout, an error of incomparably greater magnitude rests with the undevout. To err in modes of prayer may be reprehensible; but not to pray, is mad. And when those whose temper is abhorrent to religious services animadvert sarcastically upon the follies, real or supposed, of religionists, there is a sad inconsistency in such criticisms, like that which is seen when the insane make ghastly mirth of the manners or personal defects of their friends and keepers.

The doctrine of immortality, as revealed in the Scriptures, gives at once reason and force to devotion; for if the interests of the present life only, in which "one event happeneth to the just and to the unjust," were taken into calculation, the utility of prayer could scarcely be proved, and never be made conspicuous, at least not to the profane. As a matter of feeling, it is the expectation of a more direct and sensible intercourse with the Supreme Being in a future life, that imparts depth and energy to the sentiments which fill the mind in its approaches to the throne of the heavenly Majesty. But the man of earth, who thinks himself rich when he has enjoyed the delights of seventy summers, and who deems the hope of eternity to be of less value than an hour of riotous sensuality, can never desire to penetrate the veil of second causes, or to "find out the Almighty."—Glad to snatch the boons of the present life, he covets no knowledge of the Giver.

Not so those into whose hearts the belief of a future life—of such a future life as Christianity depicts, has entered. They feel that the promised bliss cannot possibly spring from an atheistic satiety of animal or even of intellectual pleasures; but that the substance of it must consist in communion with Him who is the source and centre of good. This belief and expectation sheds vigour through the soul while engaged in exercises of devotion; for such employments are known to be the preparatives, and the foretastes, and the

earnests of the expected "fulness of joy." The only idea which the human mind, under its present limitations, can form of a pure and perpetual felicity, free from all elements of decay and corruption, is that which it gathers and compounds from devotional sentiments. In cherishing and expressing these sentiments, it grasps, therefore, the substance of immortal delights, and by an affinity of the heart holds fast the unutterable hope set forth in the Scriptures. The Scriptures being admitted as the word of God, this intensity of devotional feeling is exempted from all blame or suspicion; nor can it ever be shown that the very highest pitch of such feelings is in itself excessive or unreasonable. The mischiefs of enthusiasm arise, not from the force or fervour, but from the perversion of the religious affections.

The very idea of addressing *petitions* to Him who "worketh all things" according to the counsel of His own eternal and unalterable will, and the enjoined practice of clothing sentiments of piety in articulate forms of language, though these sentiments, before they are invested in words, are perfectly known to the Searcher of hearts, imply that, in the terms and the mode of intercourse between God and man, no attempt is made to lift the latter above his sphere of limited notions and imperfect knowledge. The terms of devotional communion rest even on a much lower ground than that which man, by efforts of reason and imagination, might attain to, Prayer, in its very

conditions, supposes, not only a condescension of the divine nature to meet the human, but a humbling of the human nature to a lower range than it might easily reach. The region of abstract conceptions—of lofty reasonings—of magnificent images, has an atmosphere too subtile to support the health of true piety; and in order that the warmth and vigour of life may be maintained in the heart, the common level of the natural affections is chosen as the scene of intercourse between heaven and earth. In accordance with this plan of devotion, not only does the Supreme conceal Himself from our senses, but He reveals in His word barely a glimpse of His essential glories. By some naked affirmations we are indeed secured against false and grovelling notions of the Divine nature; but these hints are incidental, and so scanty, that every excursive mind goes far beyond them in its conceptions of the infinite attributes.

Nor is it only the brightness of the Eternal throne that is shrouded from the view of those who are invited to draw near to Him that "sitteth thereon;" for the immeasurable distance that separates man from his Maker is carefully veiled by the concealment of the intervening orders of rational beings. Though the fact of such superior existences is clearly affirmed, nothing more than the bare fact is imparted; and we cannot misunderstand the reason and necessity of so much reserve; for without it those free and kindly movements of the heart in which genuine

devotion consists, would be overborne by impressions of a kind that belong to the imagination.—Distance is understood only by the perception of intermediate objects. The traveller who, with weary steps, has passed from one extremity to the other of a continent, and whose memory is fraught with the recollection of the various scenes of the journey, is qualified to attach a distinct idea to the higher terms of measurement; but the notion of extended space, formed by those who have never passed the boundary of their native province, is vague and unreal. Such are the notions which, with all the aids of astronomy and arithmetic, we form of the distances even of the nearest of the heavenly bodies. But if the traveller, who has actually looked upon the ten thousand successive landscapes that lie between the farthest west and the remotest east, could, with a sustained effort of memory and imagination, hold all those scenes in recollection, and repeat the voluminous idea with distinct reiteration until the millions of millions were numbered that separate sun from sun; and if the notion thus laborioully obtained, could be vividly supported and transferred to the pathless spaces of the universe, then, that prospect of distant systems which night opens before us, instead of exciting mild and pleasurable emotions of admiration, would rather oppress the imagination under a painful sense of the measured interval. If the eye, when it fixes its gaze upon the vault of heaven, could see, in

fancy, a causeway arched across the void, and bordered in long series with the hills and plains of an earthly journey—repeated ten thousand and ten thousand times, until ages were spent in the pilgrimage, then would he, who possessed such a power of vision, hide himself in caverns rather than venture to look up to the terrible magnitude of the starry skies, thus set out in parts before him.

And yet the utmost distances of the material universe are finite; but the disparity of nature which separates man from his Maker is infinite; nor can the interval be filled up or brought under any process of measurement. Nevertheless, in the view of our feeble conceptions, an apparent measurement or filling up of the infinite void would take place, and so the idea of immense separation would be painfully enhanced, if distinct vision were obtained of the towering hierarchy of intelligences at the basement of which the human system is founded. Were it indeed permitted to man to gaze upward from step to step, and from range to range, of the vast edifice of rational existences, and could his eye attain its summit, and then perceive, at an infinite height beyond that highest platform of created beings, the lowest beams of the Eternal throne—what liberty of heart would afterwards be left to him in drawing near to the Father of spirits? How, after such a revelation of the upper world, could the affectionate cheerfulness of earthly worship again take place?

Or, how, while contemplating the measured vastness of the interval between heaven and earth, could the dwellers thereon come familiarly, as before, to the Hearer of prayer, bringing with them the small requests of their petty interests of the present life? If introduction were had to the society of those beings whose wisdom has accumulated during ages which Time forgets to number, and who have lived to see, once and again, the mystery of the providence of God complete its cycle, would not the impression of created superiority oppress the spirit, and obstruct its access to the Being whose excellences are absolute and infinite? Or what would be the feelings of the infirm child of earth, if, when about to present his supplications, he found himself standing in the theatre of heaven, and saw, ranged in a circle wider than the skies, the congregation of immortals? These spectacles of greatness, if laid open to perception, would present such an interminable perspective of glory, and so set out the immeasurable distance between ourselves and the Supreme Being with a long gradation of splendours, that we should henceforward feel as if thrust down to an extreme remoteness from the divine notice; and it would be hard or impossible to retain, with any comfortable conviction, the belief in the nearness of Him who is revealed as "a very present help in every time of trouble." But that our feeble spirits may not thus be overborne, or our faith

and confidence baffled and perplexed, the Most High hides from our sight the ministries of his court, and, dismissing his train, visits with infinite condescension the lowly abodes of those who fear Him, and dwells as a Father in the homes of earth.

Every ambitious attempt to break through the humbling conditions on which man may hold communion with God, must then fail of success; since the Supreme has fixed the scene of worship and converse, not in the skies, but on earth. The Scripture models of devotion, far from encouraging vague and inarticulate contemplations, consist of such utterances of desire, or hope, or love, as seem to suppose the existence of correlative feelings, and of every *human* sympathy in Him to whom they are addressed. And though reason and Scripture assure us that he neither needs to be informed of our wants, nor waits to be moved by our supplications, yet will He be approached with the eloquence of importunate desire, and He demands, not only a sincere feeling of indigence and dependance, but an undissembled zeal and diligence in seeking the desired boons by persevering request. He is to be supplicated with arguments as one who needs to be swayed and moved, to be wrought upon and influenced; nor is any alternative offered to those who would present themselves at the throne of heavenly grace, or any exception made in favour of superior spirits, whose more elevated notions of the

divine perfections may render this accommodated style distasteful. As the Hearer of prayer stoops to listen, so also must the suppliant stoop from the heights of philosophical or meditative abstractions, and either come in genuine simplicity of petition, as a son to a father, or be utterly excluded from the friendship of his Maker.

This scriptural system of devotion stands opposed then to all those false sublimities of an enthusiastic pietism which affect to lift man into a middle region between heaven and earth, ere he may think himself admitted to hold communion with God. While the inflated devotee is soaring into he knows not what vagueness of upper space, He whom "the heaven of heavens cannot contain," has come down, and with benign condescension, has placed himself in the centre of the little circle of human ideas and affections. The man of imaginative, or of hyper-rational piety, is gone in contemplation where God is not; or where man shall never meet him: for "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, and who dwelleth in the high and holy place," when he invites us to his friendship, holds the splendour of his natural perfections in abeyance, and proclaims that "He dwells with the man who is of a humble and contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Thus does the piety taught in the Scriptures make provision against the vain exaggerations of enthusiasm; and

thus does it give free play to the affections of the heart; while whatever might stimulate the imagination is enveloped in the thickest covering of obscurity.

The outward forms and observances of worship are manifestly intended to discourage and exclude the false refinements of an imaginative piety, and to give to the religious affections a mundane, rather than a transcendental character. The congregated worshippers come into "the house of God"—the hall or court of audience, on the intelligible terms of human association; and they come by explicit invitation from Him who declares that, "wheresoever two or three are gathered together in his name, there He is" to meet them. And being so assembled, as in the actual presence of the "King of saints," they give utterance to the emotions of love, veneration, hope, joy, penitence, in all those modes of outward expression, which are at once proper to the constitution of human nature, and proper to be addressed to a being of kindred character and sympathies. Worship is planned altogether in adaptation to the limitations of the inferior party, not in proportion to the infinitude of the superior:—even the worship of heaven must be framed on the same principle; for how high soever we ascend in the scale of created intelligence, still the finite can never surmount its boundaries, or at all adapt itself to the infinite. But the infinite may always bow to the finite.

Those, therefore, who, blown up with the vapours of enthusiasm, contemn and neglect the modes and style of worship proper to humanity, must find that, though indulgence is given to their affectation on earth, there can be no room allowed it in heaven.

The dispensations of the divine providence towards the pious, have the same tendency to confine the devout affections within the circle of terrestrial ideas, and to make religion always an occupant of the homestead of common feelings. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," and wherefore, but to bring his religious belief and emotions into close contact with the humiliations of natural life, and to necessitate the use of prayer as a real and efficient means of obtaining needful assistance in distress? If vague speculations or delicious illusions have carried the Christian away from the realities of earth, urgent wants or piercing sorrows presently arouse him from his dreams, and oblige him to come back to the importunacy of prayer, and to the simplicity of praise. A strange incongruity may seem to present itself, when the sons of God—the heirs of immortality—the destined princes of heaven, are seen implicated in sordid cares, and vexed and oppressed by the perplexities of a moment; but this incongruity strikes us only when the great facts of religion are viewed in the false light of the imagination; for the process of preparation, far from being

incompatible with these apparent degradations, requires them; and it is by such means of humiliation that the hope of immortality is confined within the heart, and prevented from floating in the region of material images.

We have said, that when an important object is zealously pursued in the use of means proper for its attainment, a mere intensity or fervour of feeling does not constitute enthusiasm. If, therefore, prayer has a lawful object, whether temporal or spiritual, and is used in humble confidence of its efficiency as a means of obtaining the desired boon, or some equivalent blessing, there is nothing unreal in the employment; and, therefore, nothing enthusiastic. But there are devotional exercises which, though they assume the style and phrases of prayer, have no other object than to attain the immediate pleasures of excitement. The devotee is not in truth a *petitioner;* for his prayers terminate in themselves; and when he reaches the expected pitch of transient emotion, he desires nothing more. This appetite for feverish agitations naturally prompts a quest of whatever is exorbitant in expression or sentiment, and as naturally inspires a dread of all those subjects of meditation which tend to abate the pulse of the moral system. If the language of humiliation is at all admitted into the enthusiast's devotions, it must be so pointed with extravagance, and so blown out with exaggerations,

that it serves much more to tickle the fancy than to affect the heart: it is a burlesque of penitence, very proper to amuse a mind that is destitute of real contrition. That such artificial humiliations do not spring from the sorrow of repentance, is proved by their bringing with them no lowliness of temper. Genuine humility would shake the whole towering structure of this enthusiastic pietism; and, therefore, in the place of Christian humbleness of mind, there are cherished certain ineffable notions of self-annihilation, and self-renunciation, and we know not what other attempts at metaphysical suicide. If you receive the enthusiast's description of himself, he has become, in his own esteem, by continued force of divine contemplation, infinitely less than an atom—a very negative quality—an incalculable fraction of positive entity: meanwhile the whole of his deportment betrays the sensitiveness of a self-importance ample enough for a god.

Minds of superior order, and refined by culture, may be full fraught with enthusiasm without exhibiting any very reprehensible extravagances: for taste and intelligence conceal the offensiveness of error as well as of vice. But it will not be so with the gross and the uneducated. These, if they are taught to neglect the substantial purposes of prayer, and are encouraged to seek chiefly the gratifications of excitement, will hardly refrain from the utterance of discontent, when they fail of success. Whatever physical or

accidental cause may oppress the animal spirits, and frustrate the attempt to reach the desired pitch of emotion, gives occasion to some sort of querulous altercation with the Supreme Being, or to some disguised imputations of caprice on the part of Him who is supposed to have withheld the expected spiritual influence. Thus the divine condescension in holding intercourse with man on the level of friendship, is abused in this wantonness of irreverence; and the very same temper which impels a man of vulgar manners, when disappointed in his suit, to turn upon his superior with rude opprobriums, is, in its degree, indulged towards the majesty of heaven. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," is a rebuke which belongs to those who thus affront the Most High with the familiarities of common companionship. We say not that flagrant abuses of this kind are of frequent occurrence, even among the uneducated; yet neither are they quite unknown. A perceptible tendency towards them always accompanies the enthusiastic notion that the principal part of piety is excitement.

The substitution of the transient and unreal, for the real and enduring objects of prayer, brings with it often that sort of ameliorated mysticism which consists in a solicitous dissection of the changing emotions of the religious life, and in a sickly sensitiveness, which serves only to divert attention from what is important in practical

virtue. There are anatomists of piety who destroy all the freshness and vigour of faith and hope and charity, by immuring themselves, night and day, in the infected atmosphere of their own bosoms.—Let a man of warm heart, who is happily surrounded with the dear objects of the social affections, try the effect of a parallel practice;—let him institute anxious scrutinies of his feelings towards those whom, hitherto, he has believed himself to regard with unfeigned love;—let him in these inquiries have recourse to all the fine distinctions of a casuist, and use all the profound analyses of a metaphysician, and spend hours daily in pulling asunder every complex emotion of tenderness that has given grace to the domestic life; and, moreover, let him journalize these examinations, and note particularly, and with the scrupulosity of an accomptant, how much of the mass of his kindly sentiments he has ascertained to consist of genuine love, and how much was selfishness in disguise; and let him, from time to time, solemnly resolve to be, in future, more disinterested and less hypocritical in his affection towards his family. What, at the end of a year, would be the result of such a process? What, but a wretched debility and dejection of the heart, and a strangeness and a sadness of the manners, and a suspension of the native expressions and ready offices of zealous affection? Meanwhile the hesitations and the musings, and the upbraidings of an introverted sensibility

absorb the thoughts. Is it, then, reasonable to presume that similar practices in religion can have a tendency to promote the healthful vigour of piety?

By the constitution of the human mind, its emotions are strengthened in no other way than by exercise and utterance; nor does it appear that the religious emotions are exempted from this general law. The Divine Being is revealed to us in the Scriptures as the proper and supreme object of reverence, of love, and of affectionate obedience; and the natural means of exercising and of expressing these feelings are placed before us, both in the offices of devotion, and in the duties of life;—just in the same way that the opportunities of enhancing the domestic affections are afforded in the constitution of social life. Why, then, should the Christian turn aside from the course of nature, and divert his feelings from their outgoings towards the supreme object of devotional sentiments, by instituting curious researches into the quality and quantity and composition of all his religious sensations? This spiritual hypochondriasis enfeebles at once the animal, the intellectual, and the moral life, and is usually found in conjunction with infirmity of judgment, infelicity of temper, and inconsistency of conduct.

But it is alleged that the heart, even after it has undergone spiritual renovation, is fraught with hidden evils which mingle their influence

with every emotion of the new life, and that an incessant analysis is necessary in order to detect and to separate the lurking mischiefs.—To know the evils of the heart is indeed indispensable to the humility and the caution of true wisdom; and whoever is utterly untaught in this dismal branch of learning is a fool. But to make it the chief object of attention is not only unnecessary, but fatal to the health of the soul.

The motives of the social, not less than those of the religious life, are open to corrupting mixtures, which spoil their purity, and impair their vigour. As, for example, the emotion of benevolence, which impels us to go in quest of misery, and to labour and suffer for its relief, is liable, in most men's minds, to be alloyed by some particles of the desire of applause; indeed there are nice and learned anatomists of the heart, who assure us that benevolence, when placed in the focus of high optic powers, exhibits nothing but a gay feathery coat of vanity, set upon the flimsiness of selfish sensibility. Be it so—and let men of small souls amuse themselves with these pretty discoveries. But assuredly the philanthropist who is followed through life by the blessings of those "that were ready to perish," and whose memory goes down in the fragrance of these blessings to distant ages, is not found to spend his days and nights in pursuing any such subtile micrologies. Have the sons of wretchedness been holpen by Rochefoucaulds and Bruyeres;—or by Howards?

If the philanthropist be a wise and Christian man, he will, knowing as he does the evils and infirmities of the heart, endeavour to expel and preclude the corrupting mischiefs that spring from within, by giving yet larger play and action to the great motives by which exclusively he desires to be impelled; he will, with new intentness, devote himself to the service in which his better nature delights, and bring his soul into still nearer contact with its chosen objects, and oblige himself to hold more constant communion with the miserable; and he will spurn, with renovated courage, the whispers of indolence and fear. Thus he pushes forwards on the course of action, where alone, by the unalterable laws of human nature, the vigour of active virtue may be maintained and increased.

If the heart be a dungeon of foul and vaporous poisons—if it be "a cage of unclean birds"—if "satyrs dance there"—if the "cockatrice" there hatches her eggs of mischief—let the vault of damp and dark impurity be thrown open to the purifying gales of heaven, and to the bright shining of the sun; so shall the hated occupants leave their haunts, and the noxious exhalations be exhausted, and the deathly chills be dispelled. He, surely, need not want light and warmth who has the glories of heaven before him: let these glories be contemplated with constant and upward gaze, while the foot presses with energy the path of hope, and the hand is busied in every

office of charity. The Christian who thus pursues his way, will rarely, if ever, be annoyed by the spectres that haunt the regions of a saddened enthusiasm.

The moping sentimentalism which so often takes the place of Christian motives, is to be avoided, not merely because it holds up piety to the view of the world under a deplorable disguise: nor merely because it deprives its victims of their comfort; but chiefly because it ordinarily produces inattention to the substantial matters of common morality. The mind, occupied from dawn of day till midnight, with its own multifarious ailments, and busied in studying its pathologies, utterly forgets, or remissly discharges, the duties of social life: or the temper, oppressed by vague solicitudes, falls into a state which makes it a nuisance in the house. Or, while the rising and falling temperature of the spirit is watched and recorded, the common principles of honour and integrity are so completely lost sight of, that, without explicit ill-intention, grievous delinquencies are fallen into, which fail not to bring a deluge of reproach upon religion. These melancholy perversions of Christian piety might seem not to belong, with strict propriety, to our subject; but in fact religious despondency is the child of religious enthusiasm. Exhaustion and dejection succeed to excitement, just as debility follows fever. Yesterday the unballasted vessel was seen hanging out all the gaiety of its colours,

and spreading wide its indiscretion before a breeze; but the night came, the breeze strengthened, and to-day the hapless bark rolls dismasted, without help or hope, over the billows.

Amid the various topics touched upon by Paul, Peter, John, and James, we scarcely find an allusion to those questions of spiritual nosology which, in later periods, and especially since the days of Augustine,* and very much in our own times, have filled a large space in religious writings. The Apostles believed, with unclouded confidence, the revelation committed to them, of judgment to come—of redemption from wrath by Jesus Christ, and of eternal glory: these great facts filled

* The metaphysico-devotional "Confessions" of the good Bishop of Hippo may perhaps not unfairly be placed at the head of this very peculiar species of literature. The author is reluctant to name some modern works which he might deem liable to objection, on the ground of their giving encouragement to religious sentimentalism, lest he should put into the mouth of the irreligious a style of criticism which they would not fail to abuse. He is aware that he runs a hazard of this sort in advancing what he has above advanced. He can only say that he thinks the subject much too important in itself, and too intimately connected with the theme of this Essay, to be passed in silence. And he cautions the irreligious reader, if the book should fall into the hand of any such unhappy person, not to suppose that the author would either disparage the important duty of self-examination; or speak slightingly of those mental struggles which will ever attend the conflict between good and evil in the heart that has admitted the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit. What he pleads for is, that self-examination should always have reference to the Christian standard of temper and conduct; and that spiritual conflicts should always consist of a resistance against evil dispositions or immoral practices.—What he fears on the part of religious folks is, a forgetfulness of meekness, temperance, integrity, amid the illusions—now gloomy, now gaudy—of a diseased brain.

their hearts, and governed their lives; and, in conjunction with the precepts of morality, were the exclusive themes of their preaching and writing. Evidently they found neither time nor occasion for entering upon nice analyses of motives; or for indulging fine musings and personal melancholies; nor did they ever think of resting the all-important question of their own sincerity, and of their claim to a part in the hope of the gospel, upon the abstract dialectics which have since been thought indispensable to the definition of a saving faith. Assuredly the Christians of the first age did not suppose that volumes of metaphysical distinctions must be written and read before the genuineness of religious professions could be ascertained. The want, in modern times, of a vivid conviction of the truth of Christianity, is, probably, the occasional source of many of these idle and disheartening subtilties; and it may be believed that a sudden enhancement of faith— using the word in its unsophisticated meaning, throughout the Christian community, would dispel, in a moment, a thousand dismal and profitless refinements, and impart to the feelings of Christians that unvarying solidity which naturally belongs to the perception of facts so immensely important as those revealed in the Scriptures.

In witnessing, first, the entreaties, and supplications, and tears of a convicted, condemned, and repentant malefactor, prostrate at the feet of

his sovereign; and then the exuberance of his joy and gratitude in receiving pardon and life, no one would so absurdly misuse language as to call the intensity and fervour of the criminal's feelings enthusiastical; for however strong, or even ungovernable those emotions may be, they are perfectly congruous with the occasion; — they spring from no illusion; but are fully justified by the momentous turn that has taken place in his affairs:—in the past hour he contemplated nothing but the horrors of a violent, an ignominious, and a deserved death: but now life with its delights are before him. It is true that all men in the same circumstances would not undergo the same intensity of emotion: but all, unless obdurate in wickedness, must experience feelings of the same quality. And thus, so long as the real circumstances under which every human being stands in the court of the Supreme Judge are clearly understood, and duly felt, enthusiasm finds no place: all is real; nothing illusory. But when once these unutterably important facts are forgotten or obscured, then, by necessity, every enhancement of religious feeling is a step on the ascent of enthusiasm; and it becomes a matter of very little practical consequence, whether the deluded pietist be the worshipper of some system of abstract rationalism, or of tawdry images, and rotten relics; though the latter error of the two is perhaps, preferable, inasmuch as warm-hearted fervour is always better than frozen pride.

One commanding subject pervades the Scriptures, and rises to view on every page:—this recurring theme, towards which all instructions and histories tend, is the great and anxious question of condemnation or acquittal at the bar of God, when the irreversible sentence shall come to be pronounced. "How shall man be just with God," is the inquiry ever and again urged upon the conscience of him who reads the Bible with a humble and teachable desire to find therein the way of life. In subserviency to this leading intention, the themes which run through the sacred writings, and which distinguish those writings by an immense dissimilarity from all the remains of polytheistic literature, are those of guilt, shame, contrition, love, joy, gratitude, and affectionate obedience. And moreover, in conformity with this same intention, the Divine Being is revealed—if not exclusively, yet chiefly, as the party in the great controversy which sin has occasioned. The intercourse, therefore, which is opened between heaven and earth is almost confined to the momentous transactions of reconciliation and renewed friendship. When the Hearer of prayer invites interlocution with man, it is not, as perhaps in Eden, for the purposes of free and discursive converse, but for conference on a special business. "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Almighty; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

The same speciality of purpose and limitation of subject is plainly implied in the appointment of a Mediator and Advocate; for although the establishment of this happy medium of approach authorizes and encourages even a boldness of access to the throne of the heavenly grace, it not less evidently imposes a restriction or peculiarity upon the intercourse between God and man. As the intercessor exercises his office to obtain the bestowment of the benefits secured to mankind by His vicarious sufferings, the suppliant must surely have those benefits especially in view. The work and office of the Mediator, and the desires and petitions of the client, are correlatives. "No man," said the Saviour, "cometh unto the Father but by me." It follows then, naturally, that those who thus come to the Father should keep in constant remembrance the great intention of the mediatorial scheme, which is nothing else than to reconcile transgressors to the offended Majesty of heaven. But this unalterable condition of all devotional services contains a manifest and efficacious provision against enthusiastical excitements; for the emotions of shame and penitence, and of joy in receiving the assurance of pardon, are not of the class with which the imagination has affinity; and, in a well-ordered mind, they may rise to their highest pitch without either disturbing the powers of reason, or infringing the most perfect inward serenity or outward decorum. In a word, it may be

confidently affirmed that no man becomes an enthusiast in religion, until he has forgotten that he is a transgressor,—a transgressor reconciled to God by mediation.

But when, either by the refinements of rationalism—a gross misnomer—or by superstitious corruptions, the central facts of Christianity have become obscured, no middle ground remains between the apathy of formality and the extravagance of enthusiasm. The substance of religion is gone and its ceremonial only remains—remains to disgust the intelligent and to delude the simple. This momentous principle is strikingly displayed in the construction of the Romish worship. That false system assumes the great business of pardon and reconciliation with God to be a transaction that belongs only to priestly negotiation; and as forgiveness has its price, and the priest is at once the appraiser of the offence, and the receiver of the mulct, it would be an intrusion upon his function—an interference that must derange his balances, for the transgressor to act on his own behalf, or ever to inquire what passes between the authorized agent of mercy, and the court of heaven. No room then is left in this system for the great and central subject of all devotional exercises. The doctrine of pardon having been cut off from worship, worship becomes unsubstantial. The expiatory death and availing intercession of the Son of God are taken within the rail of sacerdotal usurpation; and of necessity, if Jesus Christ is at

all to be set forth "crucified before the people," it can only be as an object of dramatic exhibition;—this is the secret of the popish magnificence of worship. Music, and painting, and pantomime, and a tinsel declamation, must do their several parts to disguise the subduction of the essentials of devotion. The laity, having nothing to transact with God, must be amused and beguiled, "lest haply the gospel of His grace" should enter the heart, and so the trading intervention of the priest be superseded.

The great purpose of the Romish worship, which is to preclude all genuine feelings by substituting the enthusiasm of the imagination, is accomplished, it must be confessed, with consummate skill and knowledge of the human mind. The end proposed will, manifestly, be best attained when the emotions which spring from the imagination are carried up to the very nearest possible resemblance to those that belong to the heart. The nicest imitation will be the most successful in this machinery of delusion. Hence it is, that while all those means of excitement are employed which quicken the physical sensibilities, the deeper sensibilities of the soul are also addressed, and yet always by the intervention of dramatic or poetic images.—A plain and undisguised appeal to the heart is unknown to the system.

If it be for a moment forgotten, that in every bell, and bowl, and vest of the Romish service,

there is hid a device against the liberty and welfare of mankind, and that its gold, and pearls, and fine linen are the deckings of eternal ruin; and if this apparatus of worship be compared with the impurities and the cruelties of the old polytheistic rites, great praise may seem due to its contrivers. Nothing in Christianity that might subserve the purposes of dramatic effect has been overlooked; even the most difficult parts of the materials have been wrought into keeping. The humiliations and poverty which shroud the glory of the principal personage, and the horrors of his death;—the awful beauty and compassionate advocacy of the virgin mother, the queen of heaven;—the stern dignity of the twelve;—the marvels of miraculous power;—the heroism of the martyrs;—the mortifications of the saints;—the punishment of the enemies of the church;—the practices of devils;—the intercession and tutelary cares of the blessed;—the sorrows of the nether world, and the glories of the upper;—all these materials of poetic and scenic effect have been elaborated by the genius and taste of the Italian artists, until a spectacle has been got up which leaves the most splendid shows of the ancient idol-worship of Greece and Rome at a vast distance of inferiority.*

* Strictly speaking, the religion of Greece was not *eminently* a religion of ritual splendour; on the contrary, there reigned in the public services of the most intellectual of all nations much of

But of what avail is all this sumptuous apparatus in promoting either genuine piety or purity of manners? History and existing facts leave no obscurity on the question; for the atrocity of crime, and the foulness of licentiousness, have ever kept pace with the perfectionment of the Romish service. Those nations upon whose manners it has worked its proper influence with the fullest effect, have been the most corrupt and the most debauched. Splendid rites and odious vices have dwelt in peace under the same consecrated roofs, and the actors and spectators of these sacred pantomimes have been wont to rush together from the solemn pomps of worship to the chambers of filthy sin.

The substitution of poetic enthusiasm for genuine piety may however take place without the

the simplicity of devout fervour, much of the chasteness of fine taste, much of the archaic and unadorned solemnity that had descended to the Greeks from the patriarchal ages. Even in their theatres and on their race-courses, there was far less of pomp and finery than is demanded on similar occasions by a modern European populace. The Romans carried the *sublime* in decoration to a further point; and in the same degree exchanged reason and taste for colours, gildings, and draperies. Upon the Roman barbaric magnificence the corrupt church of the fifth and following centuries engrafted, in a confused medley, the gorgeous conceptions of the eastern nations—the terrible ideas of the northern hordes—the jugglings of Italian priests, and the sheer puerilities of monks and children. Such is the *Christian* worship of Rome! Nevertheless, its elements comprise so much that is beautiful, or imposing, that its puerilities catch not the eye; and a man must be *very rational* who altogether repels the impression of its services.

decorations of the Romish service; but the means employed must be of a more intellectual cast: eloquence must take all the labour on itself, and must subject the doctrines of Scripture to a process of refinement which shall deposit whatever is substantial and affecting, and retain only what is magnific, pathetic, or sublime. And yet the principles of protestantism, and, in some respects, the national temper, and certainly the spirit of the devotional services of the English church, all discourage the attempt to hold forth the subjects of evangelical teaching in the gorgeous colours of an artificial oratory. And if the evidence of facts were listened to, such attempts would never be made by men who honestly desire to discharge the momentous duties of the Christian ministry in the manner most conducive to the welfare of their hearers. A blaze of emotion having the semblance of piety, may be kindled by descriptive and impassioned harangues, such as those that are heard on days of festivals from French and Italian pulpits; but it will be found that the Divine Spirit, without whose agency the heart is never permanently affected, sternly refuses to become a party in any such theatric exercises; such emotions will therefore subside without leaving a vestige of salutary influence.

Yet is there perhaps a lawful, though limited range open, in the pulpit, to the powers of descriptive eloquence. The preacher may safely

embellish all those subsidiary topics that are not included within the circle of the primary principles on which the religious affections are built; for in addressing the imagination on these accessary points, he does not incur the danger of founding piety altogether upon illusions. The great and beautiful in nature, and perhaps the natural attributes of the Deity, and the episodes of sacred history, and the diversities of human character, and the scenes of social life, and the temporal interests of mankind, may, by their incidental connexion with more important themes, furnish the means of awakening attention, and of varying the sameness of theological discourse. Or even if no unquestionable plea of utility could be urged in recommendation of such divertisements, at the worst they are not chargeable with the desecration of fundamental doctrines; nor do they generate delusion where delusion must be fatal. But it is not so with the principal matters of the preacher's message to his fellow-men, which can never be touched by the pencil of poetic or dramatic eloquence without incurring a hazard of the highest kind, inasmuch as the excitement so engendered more often excludes, than merely impairs genuine feelings.

If the taste of an audience be quickened and cultivated, nothing is more easy to the teacher, or more agreeable to the taught, than a transition from the sphere of spiritual feeling to the regions

of poetic excitement. Intellect is put in movement by the change; conscience is lulled;—the weight that may have rested on the heart is upborne, and a state of animal elasticity induced, which, so long as it continues, dispels the sadness of earthly cares. Let it be supposed that the subject of discourse is that one which, of all others, should be the most solemnly affecting to those who admit the truth of Christianity—the awful process of the last judgment. The speaker, we will believe, intends nothing but to inspire a salutary alarm; and with this view he essays his utmost command of language, while he describes—the sudden waning of the morning sun, the blackening of the heavens, the decadence of stars, the growing thunders of coming wrath, the clang of the trumpet, whose notes break the slumbers of the dead; the crash of the pillars of earth, the bursting forth of the treasures of fire, and the solving of all things in the fervent heat. Then the bright appearance of the Judge, encircled by the splendours of the court of heaven;—the convoked assemblage of witnesses from all worlds, filling the concave of the skies. Then the dense masses of the family of man, crowding the area of the great tribunal;—the separation of the multitude;—the irreversible sentence, the departure of the doomed, the triumphant ascent of the ransomed.

Compared with themes like these, how poor were the subjects of ancient oratory! And such

is their force, such the freshness of their power, that though a thousand times presented to the imagination, they may yet again, whenever skilfully managed, command breathless attention—while the sands of the preacher's hour are running out. Nor ought it to be absolutely affirmed that excitements of this kind can never produce salutary impressions; or that such impressions never accompany the hearer beyond the threshold of the church, or survive a day's contact with secular interests: peremptory assertions of this sort are unnecessary to our argument. The question to be answered is, whether this species of movement be not of the nature of mere enthusiasm, and whether it does not ordinarily rather exclude than promote religious feelings.

In regard to the illustration we have adduced, there might be room for a previous inquiry;—whether on sound principles of interpretation, the language of Scripture ought to be understood as giving warrant to those material images of terrible sublimity with which it is usual to invest the proceedings of the future day of retribution. But let it be granted that the customary representations of popular oratory are not erroneous; and that when the preacher thus accumulates the physical machinery of terror, he is truly picturing that last scene of the terrestrial history of man. Even then it were not difficult, by an effort of reasoning and of meditation, and by following out the emotions of our moral constitution, to realize

the feelings which must fill the soul on that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be published; and these feelings may be imagined, on probable grounds of anticipation, to be such as must render all exterior perceptions dim, and make even the most stupendous magnificence of the surrounding scene, to fade from the sight. It is nothing but the present torpor of the moral sentiments that allows to material ideas so much power to occupy and overwhelm the mind; but when the soul shall be quickened from its lethargy, then, good and evil will take that seat of influence which has been usurped by unsubstantial images of greatness, beauty, or terror. What are the thunderings of a thousand storms, what the clangour of the trumpet, or the crash of earth, or the universal blaze; what the dazzling front of the celestial array; or even the appalling apparatus of punishment, to the spirit that has become alive to the consciousness of its own moral condition, and is standing naked in the manifested presence of the High and Holy One! That time of judgment, which is to dispel all disguises and to drag sin from his coverts into the full light of heaven, will assuredly find no moment of leisure for the discursive eye; one perception, one emotion will doubtless rule exclusive in the soul.

No extravagance or groundless refinement is contained in the supposition that in the great day of inquiry, and award, the moral shall so

overwhelm the physical, that when, by regular process of evidence, according to the forms of that perfect court, conviction has been obtained of even some minor offence against the eternal laws of purity or justice—an offence which, if confessed on earth, would hardly have brought a blush upon the cheek, the heart will be penetrated with an anguish of shame that shall preclude the perception of surrounding wonders: on that day it will be sin, not a flaming world, that shall appal the soul.

If anticipations such as these approve themselves to reason, it follows that the humblest and the least adorned eloquence of a purely moral kind, of which the only topics are sin and holiness, guilt and pardon, takes incomparably a nearer and a safer road towards the attainment of the great object of Christian instruction, than the most overwhelming oratory that addresses itself chiefly to the imagination. Nay, it may be affirmed that such oratory, however artfully elaborated, and however well intended it may be, is nothing better than a curtain, finely wrought indeed with gorgeous colours, but serving to hide from men the substantial terrors of the day of retribution.

Nothing then can be more glaringly inequitable than the manner in which the imputation of enthusiasm is frequently advanced in relation to pulpit oratory. On the ground, either of common sense or of philosophical analysis, the epithet

must be assigned to him who, in neglect or contempt of the substance of his argument, draws an idle and profitless excitement from its adjuncts. And on the same ground we must exculpate from such a charge the speaker who, however intense may be his fervour, is himself moved, and labours to move others by what is most solid and momentous in his subject. Now to recur for a moment to the illustration already adduced. In the anticipations we may form of the day of judgment, there are combined two perfectly distinct classes of ideas;—on the one side there are those images of physical grandeur and of dramatic effect which offer themselves to the imaginative orator as the proper materials of his art, and which, if skilfully managed, will not fail to produce the kind of excitement that is desired by both speaker and hearer. On the other side there are, in these anticipations, the forensic proceedings which form the very substance of the fearful scene; and these proceedings, though of infinite moment to every human being, tend rather to quell than to excite the imagination, and therefore afford the preacher no means of producing effect, or even of keeping alive attention, unless the conscience of the hearer is alarmed, and his heart opened to the salutary impressions of fear, shame, and hope. In looking then at these themes, so distinct in their qualities, we ask—Is he the enthusiast who concerns himself with the substance, or he who amuses himself

and his hearers with the shadow? Yet is it common to hear an orator spoken of as a sound and sober divine, who, for maintaining his influence and popularity, depends exclusively, constantly, and avowedly upon his powers to affect the imagination and the passions by poetic or dramatic images, and who is perpetually labouring to invest the solemn doctrines of religion in a garb of attractive eloquence. Meanwhile a less accomplished speaker, who—perhaps with more of vehemence than of elegance—insists simply upon the momentous part of his message, is branded as an enthusiast, merely because his fervour rises some degrees above that of others. Ineffable folly! to designate as enthusiastical the intensity of genuine emotions, and to approve as rational mere deliriums of the fancy, which intercept the influence of momentous truths upon the heart. Yet such is the wisdom of the world!

It cannot be pretended that the distinction between genuine and enthusiastic piety turns upon a metaphysical nicety:—nothing so important to all men must be imagined to await the determination of abstruse questions; and if the distinction which has been illustrated in the preceding pages is not perfectly intelligible, it may safely be rejected as of no practical value. But surely there can hardly be any one so little observant of his own consciousness as not to have

learned that the feelings excited by what is beautiful or sublime, terrible or pathetic, differ essentially from those emotions that are kindled in the heart by the ideas of goodness and of purity, or of malignancy and pollution. And every one must know that virtue and piety have their range among feelings of the latter, not of the former class; and every one must perceive that if the former occupy the mind to the exclusion of the latter, the moral sentiments cannot fail to be impoverished or corrupted. It is moreover very evident that the great facts of Christianity possess, adjunctively, the means of exciting, in a powerful degree, the emotions that belong to the imagination, as well as those which affect the heart; it therefore follows that the former may, in whole or in part, supplant the latter; and thus a fictitious piety be engendered, which, while it produces much of the semblance of true religion, yields none of its substantial fruits. In this manner it may happen—not in rare instances, but in many—that if, in the history of an individual, a season of religious excitement has once taken place, though it had in it little or nothing of the elements of a change from evil to good, it may have been assumed as constituting a valid and inadmissible initiation in the Christian life; and if subsequently the decencies of religion and of morality have been preserved, a strong supposition of sincerity is entertained to the last, even though all was illusory.

Yet these melancholy cases of self-deception are not to be remedied by mere explanations of the delusion; on the contrary, the practical use to be made of definitions and distinctions and descriptions in matters of religious feeling, is to exhibit the necessity, and to enhance the value of more available tests of sincerity. Thus, for example, if it appears that, in times like the present, when religious profession undergoes no severe probation, the danger of substituting some species of enthusiasm for true piety is extreme, there will appear the greater need to have recourse to those means of proof which infallibly discriminate between truth and pretension. This means of proof is nothing else than the standard of morals and of temper exhibited in the Scriptures. No other method of determining the most momentous of all questions is given to us; and none other is needed. We can neither ascend into the heavens, there to inspect the book of life, nor satisfactorily descend into the depths of the heart to analyze the complex and occult varieties of its emotions. But we may instantly and certainly know whether we do the things which he has commanded whom we call Lord.

SECTION III.

ENTHUSIASTIC PERVERSIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE INFLUENCE.

A SENTIMENT natural to the human mind, leads it to entertain and to dwell with pleasure upon the belief of the stability and permanence of the material world. Whether we view the multiform ranks of organized and animated beings which cover the earth, or examine the occult processes of nature, or look upwards, and contemplate distant worlds, the regularity with which the great machine of the visible creation effects its revolutions, inspires a deep emotion of delight. This feeling brings with it involuntarily the supposition of extended duration; nor is it without extreme difficulty that we can separate the idea of so vast a combination of causes and effects, moving forwards with unfailing precision from the thought—if not of eternity—yet of unnumbered ages gone by, and yet to come. While these natural impressions occupy the mind, a strange revulsion of feeling takes place, if suddenly it is recollected that the massy pillars of creation, with its towering superstructure, and its high-wrought embellishments, and its innumerable tenants, are

absolutely destitute of intrinsic permanency, and that the stupendous frame, with its nice and mighty movements, is incessantly issued anew from the fount of being. Apart from the Divine volition, perpetually active, there can be no title to existence; and in the moment which should succeed to the cessation of the efficient will of the First Cause, all creatures must fall back to utter dissolution.

Reason as well as faith justifies this doctrine, and demands that we deny independency to whatever is created, and devoutly confess that God is "all in all." In Him by whom they were formed, "all things consist;"—in Him all "live and move and have their being."—He is the author and giver of life; and in the strictest sense it may be affirmed that every day is a day of creation, not less than that on which "the morning stars" uttered their earliest shout of joyous wonder: every moment during the lapse of ages, the word of power is pronounced from the height of the Eternal Throne—"let there be light" and life. This belief constitutes the basement-principle of all religion, and is the sentiment from which piety must take its spring. The notion of independency and of eternity, suggested by the regular movements of nature, are thus thrown off from the surface of the visible world, and go to enhance our impressions of the glories of Him who alone is eternal, unchangeable and independent.

But it is certain that the conditions of existence, not less than its matter and form, are from God. In truth the notions of being, and of well-being, are not to be distinguished in reference to the Divine causation; for each of His works is perfect, both in model and in movement. There is therefore no particle of virtue or of happiness in the universe, any more than of bare existence, of which God is not the author. Neither Scripture nor philosophy permits exceptions or distinctions to be made; for if we attribute to the Creator the organ, we must also attribute to Him its functions, and its health—which is only the perfection of its functions. And thus also, if the soul, with its complex apparatus of reason, and moral sentiment, and appetite, be the handy work of God, so is its healthful action. But the healthful action of the soul consists in love to God and free subjection to His will. Virtue is nothing else in its substance—nothing else in its cause. As in Him "we live and move and have our being," so also it is He who "worketh in us to will and to do" whatever is pleasing to himself. Whether we take the safe and ready method of acquiescing in the obvious sense of a multitude of Scriptures, or pursue the laborious deductions of abstract reasoning, the same conclusion is attained—that in the present world and in every other where virtue and happiness are found, virtue and happiness are the emanations of the divine blessedness and purity.

But if this efflux of the Divine nature belongs

to the original constitution of intelligent beings, and is the permanent and only source of all goodness and felicity, it must be intimately fitted to the movements of mind; and must harmonize perfectly with its mechanism;—just as perfectly as the creative influence harmonizes with the mechanism and movements of animal life.

Whatever is vigorous and healthful in the one kind of existence, or holy and happy in the other, is of God, whose power and goodness are, throughout the universe, the natural—not the supernatural cause of whatever is not evil. It were then a strange supposition to imagine that this impartation of virtue and happiness may be perceptible to the subject of it, like the access of a foreign and extraordinary influence; or that while the creative agency is altogether undistinguishable amid the movements of animal and intellectual life, the spiritual agency which conveys the warmth and activity of virtue to the soul, is otherwise than inscrutable in its mode of operation. As the one kind of divine energy does not display its presence by convulsive or capricious irregularities, but by the unnoticed vigour and promptitude of the functions of life; so the other energy cannot, without irreverence, be thought of as making itself felt by extra-natural impulses, or sensible shocks upon the intellectual system; but must rather be imagined as an equable pulse of life, throbbing from within, and diffusing softness, sensibility and force through the soul.

It is indeed true that if death or torpor has long held the moral powers in suspended action, the returning principle of life, while working its way in contrariety to the inveterate derangements of the system, may make itself felt otherwise than where no such derangement has existed; yet will it only be perceived by its collision with the evils that have usurped the heart; not by its spontaneous movements. These are, in truth, the foreign and disturbing influence; it is these that make themselves known by their abrupt and capricious activity, by their convulsive or feverish force. Meanwhile the heavenly emanation which heals, cleanses, and blesses the spirit is still, and constant, and transparent, as "a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

Nevertheless, from the accidents of the position in which we are placed, the divine influence may appear under an aspect immensely unlike that in which we should view it, if our prospect of the intelligent universe were more extended than it is. Thus the sad tenant of a dungeon, who has spent the days of many years alive in the darkness of the tomb, thinks otherwise of the light of the sun, as he watches the pencil ray that traverses his prison wall, than those do who walk abroad amid the splendours of the summer's noon. Or we may imagine a world of once animated beings to be lying in the coldness and corruption of death, and we may suppose that the creative power returns and reanimates some among the

dead, restoring them instantaneously to the warmth, and vigour, and enjoyments of life. The spectator of this partial resurrection, who had long contemplated nothing but the dismal stillness and corruption of the universal death, might, in his glad amazement, forget that the death of so many, not the life of the few, is anomalous, and strange, and contrary to the order of nature. The miracle, if so he will term it, is nothing more—nothing else, than what is every instant taking place throughout the wide realms of happy and virtuous existence. The life-giving energy, whose beams of expansive beneficence had been for a while, and in this world of death, intercepted or withdrawn, has returned with a kindling revulsion to its wonted channel; and now moves on in copious tranquillity. And yet the dead may out-number the living; nevertheless the condition of the former, not that of the latter, is extraordinary; and the return to life, how amazing soever it may seem, can with no propriety be called supernatural.

The language of Scripture, when it asserts the momentous doctrine of the renovation of the soul by the immediate agency of the Spirit of God, employs figurative terms which, while they give the utmost possible force to the truth so conveyed, indicate clearly the congruity of the change with the original construction of human nature. The return to virtue and happiness is termed—a resurrection to life; or it is a new

birth; or it is the opening of the eyes of the blind, or the unstopping the ears of the deaf; or it is the springing up of a fountain of purity; or it is a gale of heaven, neither seen nor known but by its effects; or it is the growth and fructification of the grain; or it is the abode of a guest in the home of a friend, or the residence of the Deity in His temple. Each of these emblems, and all others used in the Scriptures in reference to the same subject, combines the double idea of a change—great, definite, and absolute; and of a change from disorder, corruption, derangement, to a natural and permanent condition: they are all manifestly chosen with the intention of excluding the idea of a miraculous or semi-miraculous intervention of power. On the one hand, it is evident that a change of moral dispositions, so entire as to be properly symbolized by calling it a new birth, or a resurrection to life, must be much more than a self-effected reformation; for if it were nothing more, these figures would be preposterous, unnecessary, and delusive. But on the other hand, this change must be perfectly in harmony with the physical and intellectual constitution of human nature, or the same figures would be devoid of propriety and significance.

But a doctrine of divine influence like this, though so full of promise and of comfort to the aspirant after true virtue, offers nothing to those who desire transitory excitements, and who look

for visible displays of supernatural power; and therefore it does not satisfy the religious enthusiast. Not content to be the recipient of an invigorating and purifying emanation, which, unseen and unperceived, elevates the debased affections, and fixes them on the Supreme Excellence; nor satisfied to know that, under this healing influence, the inveteracy of evil dispositions is broken up, and a real advance made in virtue, he asks some sensible evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and would fain so dissect his own consciousness as to bring the presence of the Divine agent under palpable examination. Or he seeks for some such extraordinary turbulence of emotion as may seem unquestionably to surpass the powers and course of nature. Fraught with these wishes, he continually gazes upon the variable surface of his own feelings, in unquiet expectation of a supernatural troubling of the waters. The silent rise of the well-spring of purity and peace he neither heeds nor values; for nothing less than the eddies and sallies of religious passion can assure him that he "born from above."

A delusive notion of this kind at once diverts attention from the cultivation and practice of the virtues, and becomes a fermenting principle of frothy agitations, that either work themselves off in the sourness of an uncharitable temper, or are followed by physical melancholies, or perhaps by such a relaxation of the moral

sentiments as leaves the heart exposed to the seductions of vicious pleasure. Thus the religious life, instead of being a sunshine of augmenting peace and hope, is made up of an alternation of ecstacies and despondencies; or worse—of devotional fervours and of sensual indulgences. The same error naturally brings with it a habit of referring to other, and to much less satisfactory tests of Christian character than the influence of religion upon the temper and conduct. So it happens that practical morality, from being slighted as the only valid credential of profession, comes, too often, to be thought of as something which, though it may be well in its way, is a separable adjunct of true piety.

The rate of general feeling that exists at any time in a community measures the height to which the exorbitances of enthusiasm may attain; thus in times of peculiar excitement a perverted notion of Divine influence is seen to ripen into the most fearful excesses. In such seasons it is not enough that the presence of the Holy Spirit should be indicated by unusual commotions of the mind; but convulsions of the body also are demanded in proof of the heavenly agency. Extravagance becomes gluttonous of marvels; religion is transmuted into pantomime; delirium and hypocrisy—often found to be good friends, take their turns of triumph; while humility, meekness, and sincerity, are

trodden down in the rout of impious confusion. Deplorable excesses of this kind happily are infrequent, and never of long continuance; but it has happened more than once in the history of Christianity that the habit of grimace in religion, having established itself in an hour of fanatical agitation, and become associated, perhaps with momentous truths, as well as with the distinguishing tenets of a sect, has long survived the warmth of feeling in which it originated, and whence it might derive some apology, and has passed down from father to son—a hideous mask of formality—worshipped by the weak, and loathed, though not discarded, by the sincere. Meanwhile an hereditary or a studied agitation of the voice and muscles, most ludicrous, if it were not most horrible to be seen, is made to represent before the world the sacred and solemn truth—a truth essential to Christianity, that the Spirit of God dwells in the hearts of Christians. Whatever special interpretation may be given to our Lord's awful announcement concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost—an announcement which stands out as an anomaly in the midst of his declarations of mercy, every devout mind must regard it as shedding a fearful penumbra of warning around the doctrine of divine influence, and will admit an apprehension lest he should, by any perversion of that doctrine, approach the precincts of so tremendous a guilt, or become

liable to the charge of giving occasion in others to unpardonable blasphemies.

If it be true that the agency of the Holy Spirit in renovating the heart is perfectly congruous with the natural movements of the mind, both in its animal and intellectual constitution, it is implied that whatever natural means of suasion, or of rational conviction, are proper to rectify the motives of mankind, will be employed as concomitant, or second causes of the change. These exterior and ordinary means of amendment are, in fact, only certain parts of the entire machinery of human nature; nor can it be believed that its Author holds in light esteem His own wisdom of contrivance; or is at any time obliged to break up or to contemn the mechanism which He has pronounced to be "very good." That there actually exists no such intention or necessity is declared by the very mode and form of revealed religion; for this revelation consists of the common materials of moral influence—argument, history, poetry, eloquence. The same divine authentication of the natural modes of influence, is contained in the establishment of the Christian ministry, and in the warrant given to parental instruction. These institutions concur to proclaim the great law of the spiritual world—that the heavenly grace which reforms the soul operates constantly in conjunction with second causes and natural means. In an accommodated,

yet legitimate sense of the words, it may be affirmed of every such cause, that "the powers that be are of God; there is no power but of His ordaining; and whosoever resisteth (or would supersede) the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."

No one can doubt the possibility, abstractedly, of the immediate agency of the Omnipotent Spirit of Grace without the intervention of means; nor does any one doubt the power of God to support human life without aliments—for "man liveth not by bread alone." But in neither case does He adopt this mode of independent operation: on the contrary, the Divine conduct, wherever we can trace it, is seen to approve much more of the settled arrangements of wisdom, than of the bare exertions of power. The treasures of that wisdom are surely never exhausted, nor can a case arise in which an immediate effort of Omnipotence becomes necessary merely to supply the lack of instruments. Nor does the vindication of the honours of Sovereign Grace need any such naked interpositions; for the absolute necessity of an efficient power above that which resides in the natural means of suasion is abundantly proved;—on the one hand, by the frequent inefficacy of these means, when employed under the most favourable circumstances; and on the other hand, by the frequent efficacy of means apparently inadequate to the production of the happy changes which result from them. It is

not only affirmed by Scripture, but established by experience, that "neither he that planteth, nor he that watereth, is any thing;" and at the same time it is affirmed by the one, and established by the other, that, apart from the planting and the watering of the husbandman, God giveth no increase.

No persuasion or instruction, we are assured, can of itself, in any one instance, avail to penetrate the death-like indifference of the human mind towards spiritual objects; but when once this torpor is removed by inscrutable grace, then the very feeblest and most inadequate means are sufficient for effecting the renovation of the heart. A single phrase, speaking of judgment to come, lisped by a child, will prove itself of power to awaken the soul from the slumber of the sensual life, if, when the sound falls on the ear, the spirit be quickened from above. In such a case it were an error to affirm that the change of character was effected independently of external means; for though they were disguised under a semblance of extreme feebleness, and were such as might be easily overlooked or forgotten, they had in themselves the substantial powers of the highest eloquence; and what might have been added to the momentous truth, so feebly announced, would have been little more than embellishment—like the embroideries and embossments of the warrior's garniture, which add nothing to the vigour of his arm.

Two causes seem to have operated in maintaining the notion that divine influence is dissociated from concurrent means of suasion;—The first of these is an ill-judged but excusable jealousy on the part of pious persons for the honour of Sovereign Grace; and is a mere reaction upon orthodoxy from the Pelagian and semi-Pelagian heresies: such persons have thought it necessary, for the safety of a most important doctrine, not merely to assert the supremacy of the ultimate agent; but to disparage, as much as possible, all intermediate instruments. The second of these causes is the imaginary difficulty felt by those who having unadvisedly plunged into the depths of metaphysical theology, when they should have busied themselves only with the plain things of religion, fail in every attempt to adjust their notions of divine aid and human responsibility; and, therefore, if they would be zealous for the honour due to the first, think themselves obliged almost to nullify the second. If any such difficulty actually exists, it should be made to rest upon the operations of nature, where it meets us not less than in the precincts of theology; and the husbandman should desist from his toils until schoolmen have demonstrated to him the *rationale* of the combined operation of first and second causes. Or if such a demonstration must not be waited for, and if the husbandman is to commit the precious grain to the earth, and to use all his skill and industry in favouring the inscrutable

process of nature, then let the theologian pursue a parallel course, satisfied to know that while the Scriptures affirm in the clearest manner whatever may enhance our ideas of the necessity and sovereignty of divine grace, they no where give intimation of a suspended, or a halved responsibility on the part of man; but, on the contrary, use, without scruple, language which implies that the spiritual welfare of those who are taught, depends on the zeal and labours of the teacher, as truly as the temporal welfare of children depends on the industry of a father. The practical consequences of such speculative confusions are seen in the frightful apathy and culpable negligence of some instructors and parents, who, because a metaphysical problem, which ought never to have been heard of beyond the walls of colleges, obstructs their understandings, have acquired the habit of gazing with indifference upon the profaneness and immoralities of those whom their diligence might have retained in the path of piety and virtue.

Another capital perversion remains to complete the enthusiastic abuse of the doctrine of divine influence; and this is the supposition that those heavenly communications to the soul which form a permanent constituent of the Christian Dispensation, are not always confined to the matter or to the rule of Scripture, and that the favoured subject of this teaching, at least when he has made considerable advances in the divine life,

is led on a high path of instruction, where the written revelation of the will of God may be neglected or scorned. This impious delusion assumes two forms;—the first is that of the tranquil contemplatist, the whole of whose religion is inarticulate and vague, and who neglects or rejects the Scriptures, not so much because he is averse to its truths, as because the mistiness of his sentiments abhors whatever is distinct, and definite, and fixed. To read a plain narrative of intelligible facts, and to derive practical instruction therefrom, implies a state of mind essentially different from that which he finds it necessary to his factitious happiness to maintain: before he can thus read his Bible in child-like simplicity he must forsake the region of dreams, and open his eyes to the world of realities:—in a word, he must cease to be an enthusiast.

The other form of this delusion should excite pity rather than provoke rebuke; and calls for the skill of the physician, more than for the instructions of the theologian. The limits of insanity have not yet been ascertained:—perhaps it has none; and certainly there are facts that favour the belief that the interval between common weakness of judgment and outrageous madness is filled up by an insensible gradation of absurdity, no where admitting of a line of absolute separation. Where, for example, shall we pause, and separate the sane from the insane, among those who believe themselves to be favoured perpetually with special,

particular, and ultra-scriptural revelations from heaven?—The most modest enthusiast of this class, and the most daring visionary, stand together on the same ground of outlawry from common sense and scriptural authority; and though their several offences against truth and sobriety may be of greater or less amount, they must both be dealt with on the same principle; for both have alike excluded themselves from the benefit of appeal to the only authorities known among the sane part of mankind, namely—reason and Scripture: those who reject both surrender themselves over to pity—and compulsion.

It would manifestly be better that men should be left to the darkness and wanderings of unassisted reason, than that they should receive the immediate instructions of heaven, unless they possess at the same time a public and fixed rule to which all such supernatural instructions are to be conformed, and by which they are to be discriminated: for the errors of reason, how great soever they may be, carry with them no weight of divine authority; but if the doctrine of divine communications be admitted—and admitted without reference to a public and permanent standard of truth, then every extravagance of impiety may claim a heavenly origin; and who shall venture to rebuke even the most pestilent error; for how shall the reprover assure himself that he is not fighting against God?

It has already been affirmed that enthusiasm,

far from being necessarily or invariably connected with fervour of feeling, is often seen to exist in its wildest excesses conjoined with the most frigid style of religious sentiment. Thus, for example, the three egregious perversions of the doctrine of divine influence, which have been described in the preceding pages, are maintained, and have been professed and defended during several generations, by a sect remarkable for the chilliness of its piety, its contempt of the natural expressions of devotional feeling, and even for a peculiar shrewdness of good sense in matters of worldly interest. But the incongruities of human nature are immense and incalculable; or it would not be seen that general intelligence, and amiable manners, and Christian benevolence, are often linked with errors which, when viewed abstractedly, seem as if they could belong only to minds in the last stage of folly and impiety.

SECTION IV.

ENTHUSIASM THE SOURCE OF HERESY.

THE creed of the Christian is the fruit of exposition: no part of it is elaborated by processes of abstract reasoning; no part is furnished by the inventive faculties. To ascertain the true meaning of the words and phrases used by those who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," is the single aim of the studies of the theologian. Interpretation is his sole function. But the work of interpretation, considered as an intellectual employment, differs essentially from that of the student of physical or abstract science; for it neither needs nor admits of the ardour by which those pursuits are animated. Nor has nature furnished the faculties that are employed in the labour of expounding the terms of ancient documents with any vivid susceptibility to pleasurable excitement. The toils of the lawyer, of the philologist, and of the theologian, must therefore be sustained by a reference to substantial motives of utility; and though there may be a very few minds so peculiarly constituted as to cultivate these studies with enthusiastic

ardour from the pure impulse of native taste, the ranks of a numerous body of men can never be filled up by spontaneous labourers of this sort.

Christianity, being as it is, exclusively a religion of documents and of interpretation, must utterly exclude from its precincts the adventurous spirit of innovation. Theology offers no field to men fond of intellectual enterprise: the Church has no work for them—none until they have renounced the characteristic propensity of their mental conformation. True Religion, unlike human Science, was given to mankind in a finished form, and is to be learned, not improved; and though the most capacious human mind is nobly employed while concentrating all its vigour upon the acquirement of this documentary learning, it is very fruitlessly, and very perniciously occupied in attempting to give it a single touch of perfectionment.

The form under which Christianity now presents itself as an object of study does, in a much greater degree, discourage and prevent speculation and novelty, than it did in the early ages; and if all the varieties of opinion which have appeared during the eighteen centuries of Church history are numbered, a large majority of them will be found to belong to the first three centuries, and to the *eastern* church. That is to say, to the period when doctors of theology, possessing the rule of faith in their vernacular tongue, had

no other intellectual employment than either to invent novelties of doctrine, or to refute them. Other causes may, no doubt, be fairly alleged as having had influence in quickening that prodigious efflorescence of heretical doctrine, which infected the whole atmosphere of Christianity in the east during the second and third centuries, and at a time when the Western Church maintained, in a high degree, the simplicity of Scriptural faith; but the cause above-mentioned ought not to be ranked among the least efficient.

Theology in modern times offers an unbounded field of toil to the student—the toil of mere acquisition and of critical research; for a familiar knowledge of three languages, at least, is indispensable to every man who would take respectable rank as a teacher of Christianity; especially to every one who aspires to distinction in his order: and some acquaintance with two or three other languages, is also an object of reasonable ambition to the theological student. And moreover, an accomplished expounder of Scripture must be well versed in profane and church history; nor may he be entirely ignorant of even the abstract and physical sciences. These multifarious pursuits, which are to be acquired compatibly with the discharge of the public duties of the pastoral office, assuredly furnish employment enough for the most active and the most industrious mind long beyond the period of college initiation. Nor are we to calculate merely upon the natural

influence produced upon the intellectual habits by these employments, in preventing that discursiveness of the inventive faculties which is a principal source of heresy; for its *quality*, not less than its quantity, is decidedly corrective of the propensity to generate novelties of opinion.

Every one who has made the experiment well knows that the toils of learned acquisition have a direct tendency to impair the freshness and force of the intellectual constitution, to chill and cloud the imagination, to break the elasticity of the inventive faculty; if not to blunt the keenness of the powers of analysis. Thus they indispose the mind to the wantonness of speculation, and impart to it rather the timidity, the acquiescence, the patience, which are proper to the submissive exposition of an authoritative rule of faith. Biblical learning, therefore, not only serves directly to dispel errors of opinion by throwing open the true sense of Scripture; but it contains within itself what might be termed a *physical* preventive against heresy, which, if it be not always efficacious, is perceptibly operative. Nothing then can be more desirable than that public opinion should continue, as it now does, to demand erudition from the teachers of religion.

Nevertheless, when a large class of men is professionally devoted to the study of theology, there will not be wanting some whose mental conformation (not to mention motives which are

foreign to our subject) impels them to abandon the modest path of exposition, and to seek, within the precincts of religion, for the intellectual gratifications that accompany abstruse speculation—discovery—invention—exaggeration, and paradox. All these pleasures of a morbid or misdirected intellectual activity may be obtained in the regions of theology, not less than in those of mathematical and physical science, if once the restraints of a religious and heartfelt reverence for the authority of the word of God are discarded. The principal heresies that have disturbed the church may, no doubt, fairly be attributed to motives springing from the pride or perverse dispositions of the human heart; but often a mere intellectual enthusiasm has been the real source of false doctrine.

Errors generated in this manner possess, commonly, some aspect of beauty or of greatness, or of philosophical simplicity to recommend them; for as they were framed amid a pleasurable excitement of the mind, so they will have power to convey a kindred delight to others. And such exorbitances of doctrine, when advanced by men of powerful or richly furnished minds, conceal their deformity and evil tendency beneath the attractions of intelligence. But the very same extravagances and showy paradoxes, when caught up by inferior spirits, presently lose their garb, not only of beauty, but of decency, and show themselves in

the loathsome nakedness of error. The mischief of heresy is often more active and conspicuous in second hands than in those of its authors; and the reason is that it is usually the child of intellectualists—an inoffensive order of men: but no sooner has it been brought forth and reared, than it joins itself, as by instinct, to minds of vulgar quality, and in that society soon learns the dialect of impiety and licentiousness. The heresiarch, though he may be more blameworthy, is often much less audacious, and less corrupted, than his followers; for he, perhaps, is only an enthusiast; they have become fanatics.

In like manner as the passion for travel impels a man to perambulate the earth, and then makes him sigh to think that he has not other continents to explore, so the constitutional enthusiasm of speculation urges its victim to traverse the entire circuit of opinions; and even then leaves him insatiate of novelty. It is not caprice, much less is it the excessive solicitude of an honest mind, always inquiring for truth; but rather the impetus of a too highly-wrought intellectual activity, which carries the heretic onward and onward, from system to system, blazing as he goes, until there remains no form of flagrant error with which he has not scared the sober world. Then, though reason may have forgotten all consistency, pride has a better memory; and as this passion forbids his return to the centre truths he has so often denounced, and denounced

from all points of his various course, nothing remains for him, when the season of exhaustion arrives, but to go off into the dark void of infidelity.

The sad story has been often realized.—In the conformation of the *heretic by temperament* there is more of intellectual mobility than of strength: a ready perception of analogies gives him both facility and felicity in collecting proofs, or rather illustrations, in support of whatever opinion he adopts. So copious are the materials of conjectural argument which crowd upon him, and so nice is his tact of selection, and so quick his skill of arrangement, that ere dull sobriety has gathered up its weapons, he has reared a most imposing front of defence. Pleased and even surprised with his own work, he now confidently maintains a position which at first he scarcely thought to be seriously defensible. Having convinced himself of the certainty of the new truth, and implicated his vanity in its support, deeper motives stimulate the activity of the reasoning and inventive faculties; and he presently piles demonstration upon demonstration to a most amazing height, until it becomes, in his honest opinion, sheer infatuation to doubt. In this state of mind, of what value are the opinions of teachers and of elders? Of what weight the belief of the catholic church in all ages? They are nothing to be accounted of;—there seems even a glory and a heroism, as well as a duty,

in spurning the fallible authority of man:—modesty, caution, hesitation, are treasons against conscience and heaven!

The young heresiarch, we will suppose, to have spent the earliest season of life, while yet the ingenuousness of youth remained unimpaired, in the pursuits of literature or science, and to have been ignorant of Christianity otherwise than as a system of forms and offices. But the moment of awakening arrives; some appalling accident or piercing sorrow sets the interests of time in abeyance, and opens upon the soul the vast objects of immortality. Or the eloquence of a preacher may effect the change. In these first moments of a new life, the great and common doctrines of religion, perceived in the freshness of novelty, afford scope enough to the ardour of the spirit; and perhaps also, a new sentiment of submission quells, in some measure, that ardour:—the craving of the mind does not yet need heresy—truth has stimulus enough; and even after truth has become somewhat vapid, the restraints of connexion and friendship have force to retain the convert three years, or five, in the bosom of humility. But the first accidental contact with doctrinal paradox kindles the constitutional passion, and rouses the slumbering faculties to the full activity of adult vigour; contention ensues—malign sentiments, though perhaps foreign to the temper, are engendered, and these impart gloom to mysticism, and add

ferocity to extravagance. And now, no dogma that is obnoxious, terrific, intolerant, schismatical, fails to be, in its turn, avowed by the delirious bigot, who burns with ambition to render himself the enemy, not of the world only, but of the church.

But will even the last extravagance of false doctrine allay the diseased cravings of the brain? Not unless the physical inertness which, towards the middle period of life, sometimes effects the cure of folly, or perhaps some motive of secular interest, supervenes. Otherwise a progression must take place, or a retrogression; and when the heart is sick and faint from the exhaustion of over activity, when the whispers of conscience have long ceased to be heard, when the emotions of genuine piety have become painfully strange to the soul, nothing is so probable as an almost sudden plunge from the pinnacle of high belief, into the bottomless gulf of universal scepticism. A lamentable catastrophe of this kind, and which is nothing more than the natural issue of an intellectual enthusiasm, would, no doubt, much oftener take place than it does, if slender reasons of worldly prudence were not usually found to be of firmer texture than all the logic of theology.

A chronic intellectual enthusiasm, when it becomes the source of heresy, most frequently betakes itself to those exaggerations of Christian

doctrine which pass under the general designation of Antinomianism; not the Antinomianism of workshops, which is a corruption of Christianity concocted by mercenary teachers expressly to give licence to the sensualities of those by whom they are salaried; but the Antinomianism of the closet, which is a translation into Christian phraseology of the ancient stoicism. The alleged relationship consists, not so much in the similar abuse which is made in both systems of the doctrine of necessity; but in the leading intention of both, which is to enclose the human mind in a perfect envelop of abstractions, such as may effectively defend it from the importunate sense of responsibility, or obligation, and such as shall render him who wears it a passive spectator of his own destinies. The doctrine of fate was seized upon by the stoics, and is taken up by Antinomians, because, better than any other principle, it serves the purposes of this peculiar species of illusory delectation. Yet the Christian stoic has some signal advantages over his ancestor of the porch. For example: the egregious absurdities of the ancient philosophist met him on the very walk of life, and stood in the way of constant collision with the common sense of mankind: and thus the sage, in spite of his gravity and self-command, could hardly pass a day in public without being put to shame by some glaring proof of practical inconsistency; for as often as he spoke or acted like other men—as

often as he made it evident that he did not really think himself a statue or a phantom, he gave the lie direct to the fooleries of his scholastic profession.

But the modern stoic, while by a *sinister* inference from his doctrine, he takes large leave of indulgence to the flesh, (an indulgence which he uses or not as his temperament may determine,) and so borrows the practical part of epicureanism, he transfers his egregious dogmas to the unseen world, where they come not at all in contact with common sense. In the vast unknown of an eternity on both sides of time, he finds range enough, and immunity for even the most enormous paradoxes which ingenuity can devise, or sophistry defend. Besides, the argumentative resources of the modern, are incomparably more copious and various and tangible than those of the ancient stoic; for the latter could only fall back, ever and again, upon the same abstractions; but the former may take position on any part of a very wide frontier; for having so large and multifarious a volume as the Scriptures in his hand, and having multiplied the argumentative value of every sentence it contains, almost indefinitely, by adopting the rule of Origen and the Rabbis, that the whole of Scripture is mystical, and may bear *every sense* that can be found in it, he is at once secure from the possibility of being confuted, and revels in an unbounded opulence of proof and illustration in support of his positions. To the

sober interpreter the Bible is one book; but to the Antinomian it is as a hundred volumes.

With a field so wide, and means so inexhaustible, the stoic of Christianity lives in a paradise of speculation; and no revolution to which human nature is liable can be less probable than that which must take place before he abandons his world of factitious happiness. The dreamer must feel that sin is a substantial ill, in which himself is fatally implicated, not a mere abstraction to be discoursed of; he must learn that the righteous God deals with mankind not fantastically, but on terms adapted to the intellectual and moral conformation of that human nature, of which He is the author; and he must know that salvation is a deliverance, in which man is an agent, not less than a recipient.

It belongs not at all to our subject to attempt a confutation of this—the most pestiferous of the many corruptions which Christianity has undergone: our part is merely to exhibit against the system the charge of delusion or enthusiasm; and this charge needs no other proof than the plain statement, that, whereas Christianity recognizes the moral sentiments, deals in motives of every class, labours to enhance the sense of responsibility, and authenticates the voice of conscience, Antinomianism, with indurated arrogance, spurns all such sentiments, and substitutes nothing in their room but bare speculations; and these speculations are

all of a kind to cherish the idle and selfish deliriums of luxurious contemplation. But to take a course like this is specifically the part of an enthusiast. Whoever in any such manner cuts himself off from the common sympathies of our nature, and makes idiot sport of the energies of moral action, and has recourse either to a jargon of sophistries, or to trivial evasions when other men act upon the intuitions of good sense, and rebuts every idea that does not minister gratification either to fancy or to appetite, such a man must be called an enthusiast, even though he were at the same time—if that were possible—a saint.

We have spoken of the enthusiasm of mysticism. But there is also an enthusiasm of simplification. The lowest intellectual temperature, not less than the highest, admits extravagance, and sometimes even admits it more; for warmth and movement are less unnatural in the world of matter or of mind than congelation;—what so grotesque as the coruscations of frost? If the reasoning faculty had not its imaginative impulse, the sciences would never have moved a step in advance of the mechanic arts, much less would the high theorems of pure mathematics, or the abstruse principles of metaphysics, have been known to mankind. But if this natural and useful impulse is irregular and excessive, it becomes the spring of errors. Yet

the perfectionment of science and its general diffusion in modern times, operate so effectually to keep in check that propensity to absurd speculation, of which the elements are always in existence, that if we are in search of specimens of this species of intellectual disease, we must expect to meet with them only without the pale of education, and among the self-taught philosophers of workshops, who sometimes amuse the hour of stolen leisure in digesting systems of the universe—other than the one which is demonstrated in our universities.

Driven from the enclosures where the demonstrable sciences hold empire, the enthusiasts of speculation turn off upon ground where there is more scope, more obscurity, more licence and less of the stern and instant magistracy of right reason. Some give themselves to politics, some to political economy, and some to theology; and whatever they severally meet with that is in its nature, or that has become concrete, complex, or multifariously involved, they seize upon with a hungry avidity. The disease of the brain has settled upon the faculty of analysis;—all things compound must therefore be severed, and not only be severed but left in disunion. It cannot but happen in these zealous labours of dissolution some happy strokes must now and then fall upon errors which wiser men have either not observed, or have spared: mankind owes therefore a petty debt of gratitude to such

eager speculatists for having removed a few excrescences from ancient systems. But these trivial successes, which are hailed with a din of applause by the vulgar, who delight in witnessing any kind of destruction, and by the splenetic, who believe themselves to gain whatever is torn from others, inspire the heroes of reform with unbounded hopes of effecting universal revolutions; and they actually become inflated to so high a degree of presumption, that at a time when all the great questions which can occupy the human mind have been thoroughly discussed—and discussed with every advantage of liberty, of learning, and of ability, they are not ashamed to adopt a style of speaking as if they thought themselves morning stars on the verge of the dark ages, destined to usher in the tardy splendours of true philosophy upon a benighted world!

Or of true religion;—as if the Christian doctrine, in its most essential principles, had become extinct, even in the days of the apostles, and had remained "under the bushel" of superstition, not only during the ages of religious despotism, but long after the chains of that despotism have been broken, and after the human mind, with all the vigour and intensity of renovated intelligence and renovated piety, has given its utmost force, and its utmost diligence to the exposition of the canon of faith. Of what sort were this canon, if its meaning on

the most important points might, age after age, be utterly misunderstood by ninety-nine learned, honest, and unshackled men, and be perceived only by the one? Yet this is the supposition of simplificators, who from mere impulse of a faulty cerebral conformation, must needs disbelieve, because theology would otherwise afford them no intellectual exercise.

It is a common notion, incessantly repeated, and never sifted, that diversity of opinion, on even the cardinal points of Christian faith, is an inevitable and a permanent evil, springing, and always to spring from the diversity of men's dispositions and intellectual faculties. Certainly no other expectation could be entertained if Christian theology were what moral philosophy was among the sophists of ancient Athens—a system of abstractions, owning subjection to no authority. But this is not the fact; and though hitherto the ultimate authority has been much abused or spurned, the re-establishment of its power on fixed and well understood principles seems far from an improbable event. We say more, that an actual progression towards so happy a revolution is perceptible in our own times. We do not for a moment forget that a heartfelt acquiescence in the doctrines of Scripture must ever be the result of a divine influence, and is not to be effected by the same means which produce uniformity of opinion on matters of science. But while we

anticipate, on grounds of strong hope, "a time of refreshing" from above, which shall subdue the depraved repugnancies of the human mind, we may also anticipate, on grounds of common reasoning, a natural process of reform in theology—considered as a science, which shall place the intrinsic absurdities of heresy in the broad light of day, henceforward to be contemned and avoided.

The fields of error have been fully reaped and gleaned; nor shall aught that is new spring up on that field, the whole botany of which is already known and classified. It is only of late that a fair, a competent, and an elaborate discussion of all the principal questions of theology has taken place; and the result of this discussion waits now to be manifested by some new movement of the human mind. Great and happy revolutions usually stand ready and latent for a time, until accident brings them forward. Such a change and renovation we believe to be at the door of the Christian Church. The ground of controversy has contracted itself daily during the last half century;—the grotesque and many-coloured forms of ancient heresy have disappeared, and the existing differences of opinion, some of which are indeed of vital consequence, all draw round a single controversy, the final decision of which it is hard to believe shall long be deferred; for the minds of men are pressing towards it with an unusual intentness.

This great question relates to the authority of Holy Scripture; and the professedly Christian world is divided upon it into three parties, comprehending all smaller varieties of opinion.

The first of these parties—constituted of the Romish Church and its disguised favourers, affirms the subordination of the authority of Scripture to that of the priest; this is a doctrine of slavery and of ignorance, which the mere progress of knowledge and of civil liberty must overthrow, if it be not first exploded by other means. The second party comprises the sceptical sects of the Protestant world, which agree in affirming the subordination of Scripture to the dogmas of natural theology; in other words, to every man's notion of what religion *ought* to be. These sects, having no barrier between themselves and pure deism, are continually dwindling by desertions to infidelity; nor will be able to hold their slippery footing on the edge of Christianity a day after a general revival of serious piety has taken place.

The third party, comprehending the great majority of the Protestant body, bows reverently, and implicitly, and with intelligent conviction, to the absolute authority of the word of God, and knows of nothing in theology that is not affirmed or fairly implied therein. The differences existing within this party, how much soever they may be exaggerated by bigots, will vanish as the mists of the morning under the

brightness of the sun, whenever a refreshment of pious feeling descends upon the Church. They consist, in part, of mere misunderstandings of abstract phrases—unknown to the language of Scripture; in part they hinge upon political constitutions, of which so much as is substantially evil is by no means of desperate inveteracy; in part these differences are nothing better than the lumber of antiquity—the worthless relics of forgotten janglings, handed down from father to son, but now by so many transmissions, worn away to an extreme slenderness, and quite ready to crumble into the dust of everlasting forgetfulness. Men shall not always so remain children in understanding as that the lesser shall be preferred to the greater: nor shall it always be that the substantial sin of schism shall be incurred and vindicated on the ground of obscure historical questions, fit only to amuse the idle hours of the antiquary. This trifling with things sacred must come to its end, and the great law of love must triumph, and the Christian Church henceforward have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

SECTION V.

THE ENTHUSIASM OF PROPHETICAL INTERPRETATION.

Disappointment is perhaps the most frequent of all the occasional causes of insanity; but the sudden kindling of hope sometimes produces the same lamentable effect. Yet before this emotion, congenial as it is to the human mind, can exert so fatal an influence, the expected good must be of immeasurable magnitude, and must appear in the light of the strongest probability; nor must even the vagueness of a distant futurity intervene, otherwise the swellings of desire and joy would be quelled, and reason might maintain its seat. On this principle, perhaps it is, that the vast and highly exciting hope of immortal life very rarely, even in susceptible minds, generates that kind of emotion which brings with it the hazard of mental derangement. Religious madness, when it occurs, is most often the madness of despondency. But if the glories of heaven might by any means, and in contravention of the established order of things, be brought out from the dimness and concealment of the unseen world, and be placed ostensibly on this side of

the darkness and coldness of death, and be linked with objects familiarly known, they might then press so forcibly upon the passion of hope, and so inflame excitable imaginations, that real insanity, or an approach towards it, would probably, in some instances, be the consequence.

A provision against mischiefs of this kind is evidently contained in the extreme reserve of the Scriptures on all subjects connected with the unseen world. This reserve is so singular, and so extraordinary, seeing that the Jewish poets, prophets and preachers were Asiatics, that it affords no trivial proof of the divine origination of the books: an intelligent advocate of the Bible will choose to rest an argument rather upon the paucity of its discoveries, than upon their plenitude.

But now a confident and dogmatical interpretation of those prophecies that are supposed to be on the eve of fulfilment, has manifestly a tendency thus to bring forth the wonders of the unseen world, and to connect them in sensible contact with the familiar objects and events of the present state. And such interpretations may be held with so full and overwhelming a persuasion of their truth, that heaven and its splendours may seem to stand at the door of our very homes: —to-morrow, perhaps, the hastening crisis of the nations shall lift the veil which so long has hidden the brightness of the eternal throne from mortal eyes:—each turn of public affairs; a

war—a truce—a conspiracy—a royal marriage—may be the immediate precursor of that new era, wherein it shall no longer be true, as heretofore, that, "the things eternal are unseen."

When an opinion—or we should rather say a persuasion, of this imposing kind is entertained by a mind of more mobility than strength, and when it has acquired form, and consistency, and definiteness, by being long and incessantly the object of contemplation, it may easily gain exclusive possession of the mind; and a state of exclusive occupation of the thoughts by a single subject, if it be not real madness, differs little from it; for a man can hardly be called sane who is mastered by one set of ideas, and has lost the will or the power to break up the continuity of his musings.

Whether or not this explanation be just, it is matter of fact that no species of enthusiasm has carried its victims nearer to the brink of insanity than that which originates in the interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy. It need not be asked whether there is not some capital error on the side of many who have given themselves to this study; for the indications of egregious delusion have been of a kind not to be mistaken. There must be present some lurking mischief when the study of any part of Holy Scripture issues in extravagance of conduct, and in an offensive turgidness of language, and produces—not quietness and peace, but a wild and quaking

looking-for of impending wonders. There must be a fault of principle when the demeanour of Christians is such that those who occupy the place of the unlearned are excused when they say, "ye are mad."

That some peculiar danger haunts this region of biblical inquiry is established by a double proof; for not only have men of exorbitant imaginations and feeble judgment rushed towards it instinctively, and with the eagerness of infatuation; but sometimes the soundest understandings have lost, in these inquiries, their wonted discretion. At several periods of church history, and again in our own times, multitudes have drunk to intoxication of the phial of prophetic interpretation; and, amid imagined peals of the mystic thunder, have become deaf to the voice both of common sense and of duty. The piety of such persons—if piety it may be called, has made them hunger and thirst, not for "the bread and water of life," but for the news of the political world. In such instances it may be confidently affirmed, previously to a hearing of the argument, that, even if the interpretation were true, it has become entangled with some knotted thread of egregious error.

The proper remedy for evils of this kind is not to be found in the timid or overbearing prohibitions of those who endeavour to prevent the mischief by interdicting inquiry; and who would make it a sin or a folly for a christian to ask

the meaning of certain portions of Scripture. Cautions and restrictions of this nature are incompatible with the principles of Protestantism, as well as unnecessary, arrogant and unavailing. If indeed man possessed any means of intrusion upon the mysteries of the upper world, or upon the secrets of futurity, there might be room to reprehend the audacity of those who should attempt to know by force or by importunity of research what has not been revealed. But when the unseen and the future are, by the spontaneous grace of heaven, in part set open—when a message which might have been withheld, has been sent to earth, encircled with a benediction like this—"Blessed are they that hear, and keep these words:" then it may most safely be concluded that whatever is not marked with the seal of prohibition, is open to scrutiny. In truth, there is something incongruous in the notion of a *revelation* enveloped in menace and restriction. But be this as it may, it is certain that whoever would shut up the Scriptures, in whole or in part, from his fellow disciples, or who affirms it to be unsafe or unwise to study such and such passages, is bound to show reasons of the most convincing kind for the exclusion. "What God has joined, let not man put asunder;" but He has connected his blessing, comprehensively, with the study of his word. It may be left to the Romish Church to employ that faulty argument, of captious arrogance,

which prohibits the use of whatever may be abused. Unless then it can be shown that a divine interdiction encloses the prophetic portions of Scripture, it must be deemed an ill-judged and irreligious, though perhaps well-intended usurpation, in any one who assumes to plant his little rod of obstruction across the highway of Revelation.

Moreover, prohibitions of this kind are futile, because impossible to be observed. Every one admits that the study of those prophecies which have already received their accomplishment is a matter of high importance and positive duty;—"we have a sure word of prophecy, to which we do well to take heed." But how soon, in attempting to discharge this duty, are we entangled in a snare—if indeed the study of unfulfilled prophecy be in itself improper! For many of the prophecies, and those especially which are the most definite, and the most intelligible, stretch themselves across the wide gulf of time, and rest upon points intervening between the days of the Seer, and the hour when the mystery of providence shall be finished: and these comprehensive predictions, instead of tracking their way by equal and measured intervals through the course of ages, traverse vast spaces unmarked; and with a sudden bound, parting from an age now long gone by, attain at once the last period of the human economy. These abrupt transitions create obscurities which

must either shut up the whole prophecy from inquiry, or necessitate a scrutiny of the whole; for at a first perusal, and without the guidance of learned investigation, who shall venture to place his finger on the syllable which forms the boundary between the past and the future—which constitutes the limit between duty and presumption? A prediction which may seem to belong to futurity, will, perhaps, on better information, be found to regard the past—or the reverse. These extensive prophecies, and such are those of Daniel and of John, must then either be shunned altogether from the fear of trespassing on forbidden ground, or they must be studied entire, in dependence upon other means than voluntary ignorance for avoiding presumption and enthusiasm. Whoever would discharge for others the difficult office of marking, throughout the Scriptures, the boundaries of lawful investigation, must himself first have committed the supposed trespass upon the regions of unfulfilled prophecy. We conclude, therefore, that a separation which no one can effect, is not really needed.*

* It is surely a mistaken caution which says—of the Apocalypse for example—"it is a dark portion of Scripture, and better let alone than explored." Very unhappy consequences are involved in such an interdiction.—This magnificent book is introduced to the regards of the Church as *a discovery* of things that must shortly come to pass. Now we must either believe that the εν ταχει, was intended to indicate a period of eighteen hundred years, (perhaps a much longer term), or admit that the initial, and probably the larger portions, of the

The ancient Church received no cautions against a too eager scrutiny of the great prophecy left to excite its hope: on the contrary, the pious were "divinely moved" to search what might be the purport and season of the revelation made by the "Spirit of Christ" to the prophets; and though these predictions did in fact give occasion to the delusions of "many

prophecy have already received their seal of verification from history, and come therefore fairly within the scope of even the most scrupulous rule of inquiry, and in fact should now form part of the standing evidence of the truth of Christianity. To think less than this seems to imply a very dangerous inference. If a part of this prophecy be actually accomplished; and if yet it be impracticable to assign the predictions to the events, will not one at least of the great purposes for which, as we are taught, prophecy was given, have been rather defeated than served? There is not perhaps a fulfilled prophecy on the page of inspiration which learned ingenuity might not plausibly allege to have been—hitherto altogether misunderstood, and erroneously supposed to relate to such or such events. It is a matter of course that, when a multitude of minds, variously influenced—and too often influenced by a wish to establish a theory upon which literary ambition may build its pretensions—are employed in the exposition of mystic predictions, *every* scheme to which any appearance of probability can be given, should actually find an advocate. And then those who wish to discourage inquiry may vauntingly say—"See how various and how opposite are the opinions of interpreters!" Meanwhile, it may be perfectly true, that among these various interpretations there may be *one* which, though not altogether unexceptionable, or wholly free from difficulties, will firmly secure the approval of every unprejudiced and intelligent inquirer.

Some very "sober" Christians, while endeavouring by all means to secure the young against the mania of prophetical interpretation, seem little aware of how far they are treading upon the very path which infidelity frequents. To advise a diligent study of prophecy (to those who have the leisure and learning requisite) would it not be far safer, than to shrug the shoulders in sage alarm, and to say—"Prophecy! oh let it alone!"

deceivers," and though they were greatly misunderstood, even by the most pious and the best informed of the Jewish people; yet did not the foreknowledge of these mischiefs and errors call for any such restrictions upon the spirit of inquiry as those wherewith some persons are now fain to hedge about the Scriptures.

To the Christian Church the second coming of Christ stands where his first coming stood to the Jewish—in the very centre of the field of prophetic light; and a participation in the glories "then to be revealed" is even limited to those who in every age are devoutly "looking for him." It is true that this doctrine of the second coming of Christ has, like that of his first, wrought strongly upon enthusiastic minds, and been the occasion of some pernicious delusions; yet, for the correction of these incidental evils, we must look to other means than to any existing cautions given to the Church in the Scriptures against a too earnest longing for the promised advent of her King. To snatch this great promise from Scripture in hasty fear, and then to close the book lest we should see more than it is intended we should know, is not our part. On the contrary, it is chiefly from a diligent and comprehensive study of the terms of the great unfulfilled prophecy of Scripture, that a preservative against delusion is to be gathered. To check assiduous researches by cautions which the humble may respect, but

which the presumptuous will certainly contemn, is to abandon the leading truth of Revelation to the uncorrected wantonness of fanaticism.

It is often not so much the intrinsic qualities of an opinion, as the unwarrantable confidence with which it is held, that generates enthusiasm. Persuade the dogmatist to be modest—as every Christian undoubtedly ought who thinks himself compelled to dissent from the common belief of the Church;—persuade him to give respectful attention to the argument of an opponent;—in a word, to surrender the topmast point of his assurance, and presently the high temperature of his feelings will come down near to the level of sobriety. To doubt after hearing of sufficient evidence, and to dogmatise where proof is confessedly imperfect, are alike the indications of infirmity of judgment, if not of perversity of temper; and these great faults, which never predominate in the character apart from the indulgence of unholy passions, seem often to be judicially visited with a hopeless imbecility of the reasoning faculties. Thus, while the sceptic becomes, in course of time, incapable of retaining his hold even of the most certain truths, the dogmatist, on the other hand, loses all power of suspending for a moment his decisions; and, as a feather and a ball of lead descend with the same velocity when dropped in a vacuum, so do all propositions—whether loaded with a weight of

evidence or not, instantly reach in his understanding the firm ground of absolute assurance.

Instead, therefore, of enhancing the arrogance of the half-insane interpreter of prophecy by inviting him to display the blazing front of his argument, it may be better—if it can be done—to demonstrate that even though it should appear that his opinion carries a large balance of probability, there is still a *special* and very peculiar impropriety in the tone of dogmatism which, on this particular subject, he assumes; so that the error of the general Church—if it be an error—is actually less than the fault of him who, in this temper, may boast that he has truth on his side. Such a case of special impropriety may, in this instance, very clearly be made out.—

The language of prophecy is either common or mystical. Predictions delivered in the style of common discourse, and free from symbols, as they are little liable to diversities of explication, do not often tempt the ingenuity of visionaries: they may, therefore, be excluded from consideration in the present instance. Mystic prophecy—or future history written in symbols, under guidance of the divine foreknowledge, in being committed to the custody and perusal of mankind, must be presumed to conform itself to the laws of that particular species of composition to which it bears the nearest analogy. For if the Divine Being condescends at all to hold intercourse with men,

it cannot be doubted that He will do so, not only in a language known to them, but in a manner perfectly accordant to the rules and proprieties of the medium He deigns to employ. Now the prophecies in question not merely belong to the general class of symbolic writing, but there is to be discerned in them, very plainly, the specific style of the enigma, which, in early ages, was a usual mode of embodying the most important and serious truths. In the enigma, the principal subject is, by some ingenuity of definition, and by some ambiguity of description, at once held forth and concealed. The law by which it is constructed demands, that while there is given, under a guise, some special mark which shall prevent the possibility of doubt when once the substance signified is seen, that substance shall be so artfully depicted that the description, though it be a true representation, may admit of *more than one explication*. There can be no genuine and fair enigma in which these conditions are not complied with. For if no special mark be given, the true solution must want the means of vindicating its exclusive propriety, when the substance signified is declared;—a vague riddle is none. Or if the special mark be not disguised—if no varnishing opacity be spread over it, the substance is manifested at once, and the enigma nullified. Again, if the general description is not so contrived as to admit *several plausible hypotheses*, then also the whole intention of the

device is destroyed, and the special mark rendered useless; for what need can there be of an infallible indicator which is to come in as arbiter among a number of competing solutions, if, in fact, no room be left for diversity of interpretation?

Whenever, therefore, among mystic enunciations we can detect the existence of some couched and specific note of identification, we may most certainly conclude that it is placed there to serve a future purpose of discrimination among *several admissible modes of solution;* or in other words, that the enigma is *designedly* so framed as to tempt and to allow a diversity of hypothetical explanations. An enigmatical or symbolical enunciation conformed to these essential rules, serves the threefold purpose of presenting a blind to the incurious—a trap to the dogmatical, and an exercise of modesty, of patience, and of sagacity, to the wise. And this seems to be the result intended, and actually accomplished by the symbolical prophecies of Scripture.

When the subject of enigma already stands within the range of our knowledge, and requires only to be singled out, the process of solution is simple. The several suppositions that seem to comport with the ambiguous description are to be brought together; and then the special mark must be applied to each in turn, until such a precise and convincing correspondence is discovered as at once strips the false solutions of all their pretensions: if the enigma be fairly

constructed, this method of induction will never fail of success. Thus, with the page of history before us, those prophecies of Daniel, for example, which relate to the invasion of Greece by the Persians—to the subsequent overthrow of the Persian monarchy by the Macedonians—to the division of the conquests of Alexander—to the spread of the Roman arms, and to the subdivision of the Roman Empire, are interpreted without hazard of error, and with a completeness and a speciality of coincidence, that carries a conviction of the divine dictation of those prophecies to every honest mind.

A course somewhat less gratifying to the eagerness of enthusiastic spirits must be pursued, if the subject of the sacred enigma does not actually stand within our view; if it rests in a foreign region—as, for example, in the region of futurity. It will by no means follow that a symbolical prediction, which remains unfulfilled, ought not to be made the subject of investigation; for as the description doubtless contains, by condensation, the substance of the unknown reality, and perhaps also much of its character, it may, even when mingled with erroneous interpretations, serve important purposes in the excitement of pious hope. The delivery of these enigmas into the hands of the Church, and their intricate intermixture with fulfilled prophecies, and their being every where embossed with attractive lessons of piety and virtue—

not to mention the explicit invitation to read and study them, may confidently be deemed to convey a full licence of examination. Yet in these instances the well-known laws of the peculiar style in which the predictions are enveloped, suggest restrictions and cautions which no humble and pious expositor can overlook. The fault of the dogmatist in prophecy is then manifest.—Is a mystic prediction averred to be unfulfilled? Then we know, that by the essential law of its composition, it is designedly—we might say, artfully constructed, so as to admit of several, and perhaps of many plausible interpretations, having nearly equal claims of probability; and we know moreover, that the special mark couched amid the symbols, and which in the issue is to arbitrate among the various solutions, is drawn from some minute peculiarity in the surface and complexion of the future substance, and therefore cannot be available for the purpose of discrimiation, until that substance in the shape and colour of reality starts forth into day.

The expositor, therefore, who presumptuously espouses any one of the several interpretations of which an enigmatical prophecy is susceptible, and who fondly claims for it a positive and exclusive preference, sins most flagrantly, and most outrageously, against the unalterable laws of the language of which he professes himself a master. If dogmatism on matters not fully revealed be in

all cases blameworthy, it is eminently and especially condemnable in the expositor of enigmatic prophecy: and that, not merely because the events so predicted rest under the awful veil of futurity, and exist only in the prescience of the Deity; but because the chosen style of the communication lays a distinct claim to modesty, and demands suspension of judgment. The use of symbols speaks a design of concealment; and do we suppose that what God has hidden, the sagacity of man shall discover? In issuing the prediction, He does indeed invite the humble inquiries of the Church; and in using symbols which have a conventional meaning He gives a clue to learned research: and yet by the combination of these symbols into the enigmatic form, an articulate warning is issued against all dogmatical confidence of interpretation.

The adoption of an exclusive theory of exposition will not fail to be followed by an attempt to attach the special marks of prophecy to every passing event; and it is this attempt which sets enthusiasm in a flame; for it belongs, in common, to all the religious vices that, though mild and harmless while roaming at large among remote or invisible objects, they assume a noxious activity the moment that they fix their grasp upon things near and tangible. There is scarcely any degree of sobriety of temper which can secure the mind against fanatical restlessness when once the habit has been formed of collating, daily, the news-

paper and the prophets: and the man who, with a feeble judgment and an excitable imagination, is constantly catching at political intelligence—apocalypse in hand—walks on the verge of insanity—or worse, of infidelity. In this feverish state of the feelings, mundane interests, under the guise of faith and hope, occupy the soul to the exclusion of "things unseen and eternal:" meanwhile the heart-affecting matters of piety and virtue become vapid to the taste, and gradually fall into forgetfulness.

The fault of the dogmatical expositor of prophecy is especially manifested when he assumes to determine the chronology of unfulfilled predictions. In the instance of prophetic dates the different lines of conduct suggested by the different styles of the communication, are readily perceived, and cheerfully observed by calm and modest interpreters. We may take, for illustration, the predicted duration of the captivity of Judah, which was made known by Jeremiah (xxix. 10) in the intelligible terms of common and popular computation; nor could the supposition of a symbolic sense of the words be admitted by any sober expositor. On the authority of this unequivocal prediction Daniel, as the time spoken of drew near, made confession and supplication in the full assurance of warranted faith. In this confidence there was no presumption, for his persuasion rested—not on the assumed validity of this or of that ingenious interpretation of

symbols, but upon an explicit declaration which needed only to be read, not expounded.

But when the beloved seer received from his celestial informant the date of *seventy weeks*, which should fix the period of the Messiah's advent and propitiatory sufferings, the employment of symbolic terms, of itself announced the double intention of, at once, revealing the time, and of concealing it. For as the terms, though mythic, bore a known import, they could not be thought to be absolutely shut up from research; yet, as by the mode of their combination, they became susceptible of a considerable diversity of interpretation, the wise and good might, after all their diligence, differ in opinion as to the precise moment of accomplishment. Thus was devout inquiry at once invited and restrained — invited, because the language of prediction was not unknown;—and restrained, because it asked for interpretation, and admitted a diversity of opinion. Those pious persons, therefore, who, at the time of the Messiah's birth, were "looking for the consolation of Israel," could not, unless favoured with personal revelations, affirm—"this is the very year of the expected deliverance;"—for the symbolic chronology might, with an appearance of reason, bear a somewhat different sense. Yet might such persons, though not perfectly agreed in opinion, lawfully and safely join in an exulting hope, that the time spoken of was not far distant, when the Son of David should appear.

The same rule is applicable to the position of the church at the present moment. No one, it may be affirmed, can have given due attention to the questions which have been of late so much agitated, without feeling compelled to acknowledge that a high degree of probability supports the belief of an approaching extraordinary development of the mystery of providence towards Christendom, and perhaps, towards the whole family of man. That this probability is strong, might be argued from the fact that it has wrought a general concurrence of belief among those whose modes of thinking on most subjects are extremely dissimilar. Christians, amid many contrarieties of opinion, are, with a tacit or an explicit expectation, looking for movement and progression, to be effected, either by a quickened energy of existing means, or by the sudden operation of new causes. This probable opinion, if held in the spirit of christian modesty, affords, under the sanction of the coolest reason, a new and strong excitement to religious hope. He who entertains it may exultingly, yet calmly exclaim, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand;" and the kindling expectation will rouse him to greater diligence in every good work, to greater watchfulness against every defilement of heart, and frivolity of spirit, and inconsistency of conduct:—he will strive, with holy wakefulness, to live as the disciple should who is "waiting for his Lord." Thus far he can justify the new vivacity of his

hopes upon the ground of the permanent motives of religion; for he feels nothing more than a Christian may well always feel; and the opinion he entertains relative to the near accomplishment of ultimate prophecy, serves only as an incitement to a state of mind in which he would fain be found, if called suddenly from the present scene. While giving free admission to sentiments of this sort, he knows that though he should be mistaken in his theoretical premises, he shall certainly be right in his practical inference.

But if the discreet Christian is tempted or solicited to admit an incongruous jumble of political speculations and Christian hopes; if he is called upon to detach in any degree his attention from immediate and unquestionable duties, and to fix his meditations on objects that have no connexion with his personal responsibility; then he will check such an intrusion of turbulence and distraction, the tendency of which he feels to be pernicious, by recollecting that his *opinion*, how probable soever it may seem, is, at the best, nothing more than *one hypothesis* among the many, which offer themselves in explanation of an enigmatical prediction. To-day this hypothesis pleases him by its plausibility; to-morrow he may reject it on better information.

Nothing then can be much more precise than the line which forms the boundary between a legitimate and an enthusiastic feeling on the subject of prophecy. Is a prediction couched

in symbol? Is it entangled among perplexing anachronisms? Is it studded with points of special reference? We then recognize the hand of heaven in the art of its construction; and we know that it is so moulded as to admit and invite the manifold diversities of ingenious explication; and that therefore, even the true explication must, until the day of solution, stand undistinguished in a crowd of plausible errors. But for a man to proclaim himself the champion of a particular hypothesis, and to employ it as he might an explicit prediction, is to affront the Spirit of prophecy by contemning the chosen style of His announcements. And what shall be said of the audacity of him, who with no other commission in his hand than such as any man may please to frame for himself, usurps the awful style of the seer, pronounces the doom of nations, hurls thunders at thrones, and worse than this—puts the credit of Christianity at pawn in the hand of infidelity, to be lost beyond recovery, if not redeemed on a day specified by the fanatic for the verification of his word!

The agitation which has recently taken place on the subject of prophecy, may, perhaps, ere long, subside, and the church may again acquiesce in its old sobrieties of opinion. And yet a different and a better result of the existing controversy seems not altogether improbable;

for when enthusiasm has raved itself into exhaustion, and has received from time the refutation of its precocious hopes; and when, on the other side, prosing mediocrity has uttered all its saws, and fallen back into its own slumber of contented ignorance, then the spirit of research and of legitimate curiosity, which no doubt has been diffused among not a few intelligent students of Scripture, may bring on a calm, a learned, and a productive discussion of the many great questions that belong to the undeveloped destiny of man. And it may be believed that the issue of such discussions will take its place among the means that shall concur to usher in a brighter age of Christianity.

Not indeed, as if any fundamental principle of religion remained to be discovered; for the spiritual church has, in every age, possessed the substance of truth, under the promised teaching of the Spirit of truth. But, obviously, there are many subjects, more or less clearly revealed in the Scriptures, upon which egregious errors may be entertained, consistently with genuine, and even exalted piety:—they do indeed belong to the entire faith of a Christian; but they form no part of its basis; they may be detached or disfigured without great peril to the stability of the structure. Almost all opinions relating to the unseen world, and to the future providence of God on earth, are of this extrinsic or subordinate character; and, as a matter of fact, pious and

cautious men have, on subjects of this kind, held notions so incompatibly dissimilar, that the one or the other must have been utterly erroneous. But the detection of error always opens a vista of hope to the diligence of inquiry; and with the mistakes of our predecessors before us for our warning, and with a highly improved state of biblical learning for our aid, it may fairly be anticipated that a devout and industrious re-consideration of the evidence of Scripture will achieve some important improvements in the opinions of the church on these difficult and obscure subjects.

And yet, though an expectation of this kind may seem reasonable, there is, on the other hand, some ground to imagine that the accomplishment of the inscrutable designs of the Divine Providence, may require that the pious should henceforth, as heretofore, continue to entertain not only imperfect but very mistaken notions, of the unseen and the future worlds. Well-founded hopes and erroneous interpretations have been linked together, in the history of the church in all ages, even from that hour of fallacious exultation when the mother of a murderer exclaimed—"I have gotten the man from the Lord"—the man who should "break the serpent's head." Neither the discharge of present duties, nor the exercise of right affections, nor a substantial preparation for taking a part in the glory that is to be revealed, is perhaps at

all necessarily connected with just anticipations of the unknown futurity. Thus when the infant wakes into the light of this world, every organ presently assumes its destined function: the heaving bosom confesses the fitness of the material it inhales to support the new style of existence; and the senses admit the first impressions of the external world with a sort of anticipated familiarity; and though utterly untaught in the scenes upon which it has so suddenly entered, and experienced in the orders of the place where it must ere long act its part, yet is it truly "meet to be a partaker of the inheritance" of life. And thus, too, a real meetness for his birth into the future life, may belong to the Christian, though he be utterly ignorant of its circumstances and conditions. But the functions of that new life have been long in a hidden play of preparation for full activity. He has waited in the coil of mortality only for the moment when he should inspire the ether of the upper world, and behold the light of eternal day, and hear the voices of new companions, and taste of the immortal fruit, and drink of the river of life; and then, after perhaps a short season of nursing in the arms of the elder members of the family above, he will take his place in the service and orders of the heavenly house, nor ever have room to regret the ignorances of his mortal state.

The study of those parts of Scripture which relate to futurity, should therefore be undertaken

with zeal, inspired by a reasonable hope of successful research; and at the same time with the modesty and resignation which must spring from a not unreasonable supposition—that all such researches may be fruitless. So long as this modesty is preserved, there will be no danger of enthusiastic excitements, whatever may be the opinions which we are led to entertain.

It must be evident to every calm mind, that the discussion of questions confessedly so obscure, and upon which the evidence of Scripture is limited, and of uncertain explication, is absolutely improper to the pulpit. The several points of the *Catholic faith* afford themes enough for public instruction. But matters of learned debate are extraneous to that faith;—they are no ingredients in the bread of life, which is the only article committed to the hands of the teacher for distribution among the multitude. What are the *private and hypothetical opinions* of a public functionary to those whom he is to teach the principles of the common Christianity? And if these doubtful opinions implicate inquiries which the unlearned can *never* prosecute, a species of imposition is implied in the attempt to urge them upon simple hearers. It is truly a sorry triumph that he obtains who wins by declamation and violence the voices of a crowd in favour of opinions, which men of learning and modesty neither defend nor impugn but with diffidence.—The press is the proper organ of abstruse controversy.

SECTION VI.

ENTHUSIASTIC PERVERSIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF A PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE.

No species of enthusiasm, perhaps, is more extensively prevalent, and certainly none clings more tenaciously to the mind that has once entertained it, and none produces more practical mischief, than that which is founded on an abuse of the doctrine of a particular Providence. It is by the fortuities of life that the religious enthusiast is deluded: Chance, under a guise stolen from piety, is his divinity. He believes, and he believes justly, that every seeming fortuity is under the absolute control of the Divine hand; but in virtue of the peculiar interest he supposes himself to have on high, he is tempted to think that these contingencies are very much at his command. This belief naturally inclines him to pay more regard to the unusual, than to the common course of events. In contemplating God as the disposer of chances, he becomes forgetful of Him who is the governor of the world by known and permanent laws. All the honour which he does to one of the divine

attributes, is in fact stolen from the reverence due to another;—but "the Lord abhorreth robbery for offering."

A propensity to look more to chance than to probability is known invariably to debilitate the reasoning faculty, and to vitiate the moral sentiments; and these constant effects are more often aggravated than mitigated by the accession of religious sentiments. The illusions of hope then assume a tone of authority which effectually silences the whispers of common sense; and the imagination, more highly stimulated than when it fed only on things of earth, boldly makes a prey of the divine power and goodness, to the utter subversion of humble piety. A sanguine temper, quickened by perverted notions of religion, easily impels a man to believe that he is privileged or skilled to penetrate the intentions of Providence towards himself, and the anticipation he forms on this ground, acquire so much consistency by being perpetually handled, that he deems them to form a much more certain rule of conduct than he could derive from the forecastings of prudence, or even from the dictates of morality.

Delusions of this kind are the real sources of many of those sad delinquencies which so often bring reproach upon a profession of religion. The world loves to call the offender a villain; but in fact he was not worse than an enthusiast. He who in conducting the daily affairs of life

has acquired the settled habit of calculating rather upon what is possible than upon what is probable, naturally slides into the mischievous error of paying court to Fortune, rather than to Virtue. Nor will his integrity or his principles of honour be at all strengthened by the mere metonymy of calling Fortune—Providence. It is easy to fix the eye upon the clouds in expectation of help from above with so much intentness, that the tables of right and wrong, which stand before us, shall scarcely be seen. This very expectation is a contempt of prudence, and it is not often seen that those who slight Prudence, pay much regard to her sister—Probity.

Or if consequences so serious do not follow from the notion that the fortuities of life are an available fund at the disposal of the favourite of heaven, yet this belief can hardly fail to spread an infection of sloth and presumption through the character. The enthusiast will certainly be remiss and dilatory in arduous and laborious duties. Hope, which is the incentive to exertion in well-ordered and energetic minds, slackens every effort if the understanding be crazed. The wheel of toil stands still while the devotee implores assistance from above. Or if he possesses more of activity, the same false principle prompts him to engage in enterprises from which, if the expected contingent to be furnished by—"Providence," be deducted, scarcely

a shred of fair probability remains to recommend the scheme.

If the course of events in human life were as constant and uniform as the phenomena of the material world, none but madmen would build their hopes upon the irregularities by which it is diversified. Nor would the enthusiast do so if he gave heed to the principles that impose order upon the apparent chaos of fortuities from which the many coloured line of human life is spun. To expose then the error of those who, on pretext of faith in providence, build presumptuous expectations upon the throws of fortune, we must analyse the confused mass of contingencies to which human life is liable. This analysis leaves the folly and impropriety of the enthusiast without excuse.

Any one who recalls to his recollection the incidents, great and small, that have filled up the days of a year past, will find it easy to divide them into two classes, of which the first, and the larger, comprises those events which common sense and experience might have enabled him to anticipate, and which, if he were wise, he did actually anticipate, so far as was necessary for the regulation of his conduct. The ground of such calculations of futurity is nothing else than the uniform course of events in the material world, and the permanent principles of human nature, and the established order of the social system;

all these though confessedly liable to many interruptions, are yet so far constant as to afford, on the whole, a safe rule of calculation. If there were no such uniformity in the course of events, the active and reasoning faculties of man would be of no avail to him; for the exercise of them might as probably be ruinous as serviceable. In the whirl of such a supposed anarchy of nature, an intelligent agent must refrain from every movement, and resign himself to be borne along by the eddies of confusion. But this is not the character of the world we inhabit: the connexion of physical causes and effects is known and calculable, so that the results of human labour are liable to only a small deduction on account of occasional irregularities. We plant and sow, and lay up stores, and build, and construct machines in tranquil hope of the expected benefit; and indeed, if the variations and irregularities of nature were much greater and more frequent than they are, or even if disappointment were as common as success, the part of wisdom would still be the same; for the laws of nature, though never so much broken in upon by incalculable accidents, would still afford *some* ground of expectation; and an intelligent agent will always prefer to act on even the slenderest hope which reason approves, rather than to lie supine in the ruinous wheel-way of chance.

And notwithstanding its many real, and many apparent irregularities, there is also a settled

order of causes and effects in the human system, as well as in the material world. The foundation of this settled order is—the sameness of human nature in its animal, intellectual, and moral constitution, of which the anomalies are never so great as to break up all resemblance to the common pattern. Then those conventional modes of thinking and acting which sway the conduct of the mass of mankind, strengthen the tendency to uniformity, and greatly counteract all disturbing causes. Then again the sanctioned institutions of society give stability and permanence to the order of events, and altogether afford so much security in calculating upon the future, that, whosoever by observation and reflection has become well skilled in the ordinary movements of the machinery of life, may, with confidence and calmness, if not with absolute assurance of success, risk his most important interests upon the issue of well concerted plans.

Skill and sagacity in managing the affairs of common life, or wisdom in counsel and command, is nothing else than an extensive and ready knowledge of the intricate movements of the great machine of the social system; and the high price which this skill and wisdom always bears among men, may be held to represent two abstractions; —*first*, the perplexing Irregularities of the system to which human agency is to be conformed; and, then, the real and substantial Uniformity of the movements of that system. For it is plain that if

there were no perplexing irregularities, superior sagacity would be in no request; or, on the other hand, if there were not a *real* constancy in the course of affairs, the greatest sagacity would be found to be of no avail, and therefore, would be in no esteem.

There is then a substantial, if not an immovable *substratum* of causes and effects, upon which, for the practical and important purposes of life, calculations of futurity may be formed. And this is the basis, and this alone, on which a wise man rests his hopes and constructs his plans: he well knows that his fairest hopes may be dissipated, and his best plans overthrown; and yet, though the hurricanes of misfortune were a thousand times to scatter his labours, he will still go on to renew them in conformity with the same principles of calculation. *For no other principles are known to him,* and the extremest caprices of Fortune will never so prevail over his constancy, as to induce him to do homage to Chance.

The second, and the less numerous class of events that make up the course of human life, are those which no sagacity could have anticipated; for though in themselves they were only the natural consequences of common causes, yet those causes were either concealed or remote, and were, to us and our agency, the same as if they had been absolutely fortuitous. By far the larger proportion of these accidents arise from the intricate connexions of the social system.

The thread of every life is entangled with other threads, beyond all reach of calculation. The weal and woe of each depends, by innumerable correspondencies, upon the will, and caprices, and fortune, not merely of the individuals of his immediate circle, but upon those of myriads of whom he knows nothing. Or, strictly speaking, the tie of mutual influence passes, without a break, from hand to hand, throughout the human family: there is no independence, no insulation, in the lot of man; and, therefore, there can be no absolute calculation of future fortunes; for he whose will or caprice is to govern that lot stands, perhaps at the distance of a thousand removes from the subject of it, and the attenuated influence winds its way in ten thousand meanders before it reaches the point of its destined operation.

Both these classes of events are manifestly necessary to the full development of the faculties of human nature. If, for example, there were no constancy in the events of life, there would be no room left for rational agency; and if, on the other hand, there were no inconsistency, the operations of the reasoning faculty would fall into a mechanical regularity, and the imagination and the passions would be iron-bound, as by the immobility of fate. It is by the admirable combination of the two principles of order and disorder, of uniformity and variety, of certainty and of chance; that the faculties and desires are

wrought up to their full play of energy and vivacity—of reason and of feeling. But it is especially in connexion with the doctrine of Providence that we have at present to consider these two elements of human life; and as to the first of them, it is evident that the settled order of causes and effects, so far as it may be ascertained by observation and experience, claims the respect and obedience of every intelligent agent; since it is nothing less than the implicit will of the Author of nature, legibly written upon the constitution of the world. This will is sanctioned by immediate rewards and punishments;—health, wealth, prosperity, are the usual consequents of obedience; while sickness, poverty, degradation, are the almost certain inflictions that attend a negligent interpretation, or a presumptuous disregard of it. The dictates of prudence are in truth the commands of God, and His benevolence is vindicated by the fact that the miseries of life are to a very great extent attributable to a contempt of those commands.

But there is a higher government of men, as moral and religious beings, which is carried on chiefly by means of the fortuities of life. Those unforeseen accidents which so often control the lot of men, constitute a *superstratum* in the system of human affairs, wherein, peculiarly, the Divine Providence holds empire for the accomplishment of its special purposes. It is from

this hidden and inexhaustible mine of chances—chances, as we must call them, that the Governor of the world draws, with unfathomable skill, the materials of his dispensations towards each individual of mankind. The world of nature affords no instances of complicated and exact contrivance, comparable to that which so arranges the vast chaos of contingencies as to produce, with unerring precision, a special order of events adapted to the character of every individual of the human family. Amid the whirl of myriads of fortuities, the means are selected and combined for constructing as many independent machineries of moral discipline as there are moral agents in the world; and each apparatus is at once complete in itself, and complete as a part of a universal movement.

If the special intentions of Providence towards individuals were effected by the aid of supernatural interpositions, the power and presence of the Supreme Disposer might indeed be more strikingly displayed than it is; but his skill much less. And herein especially is manifested the perfection of the Divine wisdom, that the most surprising conjunctions of events are brought about by the simplest means, and in a manner so perfectly in harmony with the ordinary course of human affairs, that the hand of the Mover is ever hidden beneath second causes, and is descried only by the eye of pious affection. This is in fact the great miracle of providence—that no miracles are needed to accomplish its purposes.

Countless series of events are travelling on from remote quarters towards the same point; and each series moves in the beaten track of natural occurrences; but their intersection at the very moment in which they meet, shall serve, perhaps, to give a new direction to the affairs of an empire. The *materials* of the machinery of providence are all of common quality; but their combination displays nothing less than infinite skill.

Having then these two distinguishable classes of events before us, namely, those which are calculable by human sagacity, and those which are not; it is manifest that the former exclusively is given to man as the sphere of his labours, and for the exercise of his skill; while the latter is reserved as the royal domain of sovereign bounty and infinite wisdom. The enthusiast, therefore, who neglects and contemns those dictates of common sense which are derived from the calculable course of human affairs, and who founds his plans and expectations upon the unknown procedures of Providence, is chargeable not merely with folly, but with an impious intrusion upon the peculiar sphere of the divine agency. This impiety is shown in a strong light when viewed in connexion with those great principles which may, not obscurely, be discerned to govern the dispensations of Providence towards mankind.—

In the divine management of the fortuitous events of life, there is, in the first place, visible,

some occasional flashes of that retributive justice which, in the future world, is to obtain its long postponed and perfect triumph. There are instances which though not very common, are frequent enough to keep alive the salutary fears of mankind, wherein vindictive visitations speak articulately in attestation of the righteous judgment of God upon them that do evil. Outrageous villanies, or appalling profaneness, sometimes draw upon the criminal the instant bolt of divine wrath, and in so remarkable a manner that the most irreligious minds are quelled with a sudden awe, and confess the fearful hand of God. And again there is just perceptible, as it were, a gleam of divine approbation, displayed in a signal rewarding of the righteous, even in the present life:—a blessing "which maketh rich" rests sometimes conspicuously upon the habitation of disinterested and active virtue:—"the righteous is as a tree planted by the rivers of water;—whatsoever he doeth, prospers." In these anomalous cases of anticipated retribution, the punishment or the reward does not arrive in the ordinary course of common causes; but starts forth suddenly from that store-house of fortuities whence the divine providence draws its means of government. If the oppressor, by rousing the resentment of mankind, is dragged from the seat of power, and trodden in the dust; or if the villain who "plotteth mischief against his neighbour on his bed," is at length caught in his own

net, and despoiled of his wrongful gains, these visitations of justice, though truly retributive, belong plainly to the *known* order of causes and effects:—they are nothing more than the natural issues of the culprit's course; and therefore do not specially declare the interference of heaven. But there are instances of another kind, in which the ruin of villany or of violence comes speeding as on a shaft from above, which though seemingly shot at random, yet hits its victim with a precision and a peculiarity that proclaims the unerring hand of divine justice.

In like manner there are remarkable recompenses of integrity, of liberality, of kindness to strangers, of duty to parents, which arrive by means so remote from common probability, and yet so simple, that the approbation of Him who "taketh pleasure in the path of the just," is written upon the unexpected boon. There are few family histories that would not afford examples of such conspicuous retributions. Yet as they are confessedly rare, and administered by rules absolutely inscrutable to human penetration, there can hardly be a more daring impiety than, in particular instances, to entertain the expectation of their occurrence. But the enthusiast finds it hard to abstain, in his own case, from such expectations, and is tempted perpetually to indulge hopes of special boons in reward of his services, and is forward and ingenious in giving an interpretation that flatters

his spiritual vanity to every common favour of providence;—the bottles of heaven are never stopped but to gratify his taste for fine weather! A readiness to announce the wrath of heaven upon offenders, is a presumption which characterizes, not the mere enthusiast, but the malign fanatic, and therefore comes not properly within our subject; and yet the species of enthusiasm now under consideration is very seldom free from some such impious tendency.

In the divine management of the fortuities of life, there may also be very plainly perceived a dispensation of moral exercise, specifically adapted to the temper and powers of the individual. No one can look back upon his own history without meeting unquestionable instances of this sort of educational adjustment of his lot, effected by means that were wholly independent of his own choice or agency.—The casual meeting with a stranger, or an unexpected interview with a friend;—the accidental postponement of affairs;—the loss of a letter, a shower, a trivial indisposition, the caprice of an associate—these, or similar fortuities, have been the determining causes of events, not only important in themselves, but of peculiar significance and use in that process of discipline which the character of the individual was to undergo. These new currents in the course of life proved, in the issue, specifically proper for putting in action the latent

faculties of the mind, or for holding in check its dangerous propensities. Whoever is quite unconscious of this sort of *overruling* of his affairs by means of apparent accidents, must be very little addicted to habits of intelligent reflection.

Doubtless every man's choice and conduct determine to a great extent his lot and occupation; but not seldom, a course of life much better fitted to his temper and abilities than the one he would fain substitute for it, has, year after year, and in spite of his reluctancies, fixed his place and employment in society; and this unchosen lot has, if we may so speak, been constructed from the floating fragments of other men's fortunes, drifted by the accidents of wind and tide across the billows of life, till they were stranded at the very spot where the individual for whom they were destined was ready to receive them. By such strong and nicely fitted movements of the machine of Providence, it is that the tasks of life are distributed where best they may be performed, and its burdens apportioned where best they may be sustained. By accidents of birth or connexion, the bold, the sanguine, the energetic, are led into the front of the field of arduous exertion, while by similar fortuities, quite as often as by choice, the pusillanimous, the fickle, the faint-hearted, are suffered to spend their days under the shelter of ease, and in the recesses of domestic tranquillity.

But who shall profess so to understand his particular temper, and so to estimate his talents, as might qualify him to anticipate the special dispensations of Providence in his own case? Such knowledge, surely, every wise man will confess to be "too wonderful" for him. To the supreme intelligence alone it belongs to distribute to every one his lot, and to "fix the bounds" of his abode. Yet there are persons, whose persuasion of what *ought* to be their place and destiny is so confidently held, that a long life of disappointment does not rob them of the hypothesis of self-love; and just in proportion to the firmness of their faith in a particular providence, will be their propensity to quarrel with heaven, as if it debarred them from their right in deferring to realize the anticipated destiny.—Presumption, when it takes its commencement in religion, naturally ends in impiety.

Men who look no farther than the present scene, may, with less glaring inconsistency, vent their vexation in accusing the blindness and partiality of fate which has held their eminent talents and their peculiar merits so long under the veil of obscurity; but those who acknowledge at once a disposing providence and a future life, might surely find considerations proper for imposing silence upon such murmurings of disappointed ambition. Let it be granted to a man that his vanity does not deceive him, when he complains that adverse fortune has prevented his

entering the very course upon which nature fitted him to shine, and has with unrelenting severity, confined him, year after year, to a drudgery in which he was not qualified to win even a common measure of success;—all this may be true: but if the complainant be a Christian, he cannot find it difficult to admit that this clashing of his fortune with his capacities or his tastes may have been the very exercise necessary to insure his ultimate welfare. Who will deny that the reasons of the divine conduct towards those who are in training for an endless course must always lie at an infinite distance beyond the range of created vision? Who shall venture even to surmise what course of events may best foster the germ of an imperishable life;—or who conjecture what contraventions of the hopes and interests of an individual may find their reasons and necessity somewhere in the wide universe of consequences incalculably remote?

Whether the promise "that all things shall work together for good to those who love God," is to be accomplished by perpetual sunshine or by incessant storms, no one can anticipate in his own case:—or if any one were excepted, it must be the enthusiast, who might almost with certainty calculate upon receiving a dispensation the very reverse of that which it has been the leading error of his life to anticipate. He might thus calculate, both because his expectations are in themselves exorbitant and improbable; and

because the presumptuous temper from which they spring loudly calls for the rebuke of heaven.

Amid the perplexities which arise from the unexpected events of life, we are not left without sufficient guidance; for although, in particular instances, the most reasonable calculations are baffled, and the best plans subverted; yet there remains in our hands the immutable rule of moral rectitude, in an inflexible adherence to which we shall avoid what is chiefly to be dreaded in calamity—the dismal moanings of a wounded conscience. "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely," even in the path of disaster. And while, on the one hand, he steadily pursues the track which common prudence marks out; and, on the other, listens with respectful attention to the dictates of honour and probity, he may, without danger of enthusiasm, ask and hope for the especial aids of Divine Providence, in overruling those events which lie beyond the reach of human agency.

Prayer and calculation are duties never incompatible; never to be disjoined, and never to shackle one the other. For while those events only which are probable ought to be assumed as the basis of plans for futurity; yet, whatever is not *manifestly impossible*, or in a high degree improbable, may lawfully be made the object of submissive petition. Few persons, and none who have known vicissitudes, can look back upon past

years without recollecting signal occasions on which they have been rescued from the impending and apparently inevitable consequences of their own misconduct, or imprudence, or want of ability, by extraordinary interventions in the very crisis of their fate. Or, perhaps, they have been placed by accident in circumstances of peril, where, as it seemed, there remained not a possibility of escape. But while the ruin was yet in descent, rescue, which it would have been madness to expect, came in to preserve life, fortune, or reputation, from the imminent destruction. That such conspicuous deliverances do actually occur is matter of fact; nor will the Christian endure that they should be attributed to any other cause than the special care and kindness of his heavenly Father: and yet, as they belong to an economy which stretches into eternity, and as they are not administered on any ascertained rule, they can never come within the range of our calculations, or be admitted to influence our plans:—a propensity to indulge such expectations belongs to infirmity of mind, and is in fact an intrusion upon the counsels of infinite wisdom.

Nevertheless, so long as these extraordinary interventions are known to consist with the rules of the divine government, they may be contemplated as *possible* without violating the respect that is due to its ordinary procedures, and may, therefore, without enthusiasm, be solicited in the hour of peril or perplexity. The gracious

"Hearer of prayer," who, on past and well remembered occasions, has signally given deliverance, may do so again, even when, if we think of our own imprudence, we have reason to expect nothing less than destruction. What are termed by irreligious men "the fortunate chances of life," will be regarded by the devout mind as constituting a hidden treasury of boons, held at the disposal of a gracious hand for the incitement of prayer, and for the reward of humble faith. The enthusiast who, in contempt of common sense and of rectitude, presumes upon the existence of this extraordinary fund, forfeits, by such impiety, his interest in its stores. But the prudent and the pious, while they labour and calculate in strict conformity to the known and ordinary course of events, shall not seldom find that from this very treasury of contingencies God is "*rich* to them that call upon Him."

In minds of a puny form, whose enthusiasm is commonly mingled with some degree of abject superstition, the doctrine of a particular providence is liable to be degraded by habitual association with trivial and sordid solicitudes. This or that paltry wish is gratified, or vulgar care relieved, "by the kindness of providence;" and thanks are rendered for helps, comforts, deliverances, of so mean an order, that the respectable language of piety is burlesqued by the ludicrous character of the occasion on which it is used.

The fault in these instances does not consist in an error of opinion, as if even the most trivial events were not, equally with the most considerable, under the divine management; but it is a perversion and degradation of feeling which allows the mind to be occupied with whatever is frivolous, to the exclusion of whatever is important. These petty spirits, who draw hourly, from the matters of their personal comfort or indulgence, so many occasions of prayer and praise, are most often seen to be insensible to motives of a higher kind;—they have no perception of the relative magnitude of objects;—no sense of proportion; and they feel little or no interest in what does not affect themselves. We ought, however, to grant indulgence to the infirmity of the feeble:—if the soul be indeed incapable of expansion, it is better it should be devout in trifles, than not devout at all. Yet these small folks have need to be warned of the danger of mistaking the gratulations of selfishness for the gratitude of piety.

It is a rare perfection of the intellectual and moral faculties which allows all objects, great and small, to be distinctly perceived, and perceived in their relative magnitudes. A soul of this high finish may be devout on common occasions without trifling:—it will gather up the fragments of the divine bounty, that "nothing be lost;" and yet hold its energies and its solicitudes free for the embrace of momentous cares.

If men of expanded intellect, and high feeling, and great activity are excused in their neglect of small things, this indulgence is founded upon a recollection of the contractedness of the human mind, even at the best. The forgetfulness of lesser matters which so often belongs to energy of character, is, after all, not a perfection, but a weakness;—and a more complete expansion of mind—a still more vigorous pulse of life, would dispel the torpor of which such neglects are the symptoms.

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Thwarted enthusiasm naturally generates impious petulance. If we encumber the Providence of God with unwarranted expectations, it will be difficult not so to murmur under disappointment as those do who think themselves defrauded of their right. In truth, amidst the sharpness of sudden calamity, or the pressure of continued adversity, the most sane minds are tempted to indulge repinings which reason, not less than piety, utterly condemns. The imputation of defective wisdom, or justice, or goodness, to the Being of whom we can form no notion apart from the ideas of absolute knowledge, rectitude, and benevolence, is much too absurd to need a formal refutation; and yet how often does it survive all the rebukes of good sense and religion! so egregious and palpable an error could not find a moment's lodgment in the heart, if it did not meet a surface of adhesion where

presumption has been torn away. The exaggerations of self-love not quelled, but rather inflated by an enthusiastic piety, inspire feelings of personal importance so enormous, that even the infinitude of the divine attributes is made to shrink down to the measure of comparison with man. When illusions such as these are rent and scattered, how pitiable is the conscious destitution and meanness of the denuded spirit! With how cruel a shock does it fall back upon its true place in the vast system of providence!

Whoever entertains, as every Christian ought, a strong and consoling belief of the doctrine of a Particular Providence, which cares for the welfare of each, should not forget to connect with that belief some general notions at least, of that system of Universal Providence which secures individual interests, consistently with the well-being of the whole. Such notions though very defective, or even in part erroneous, may serve first to check presumption, and then to impose silence upon those murmurs which are its offspring.

A law of subordination manifestly pervades that part of the government of God with which we are acquainted, and may fairly be supposed to prevail elsewhere. Lesser interests are the component parts of greater; and so closely are the individual fates of the human family interwoven, that each member, however insignificant

he may seem, sustains a real relationship of influence to the community. The lot of each must therefore be shapen by reasons drawn from many—and often from remote quarters. Yet in effecting this complex combination of parts, infinite wisdom prevents any clashing of the lesser with the larger movements; and we may feel assured that on the grounds either of mere equity or of beneficence, the dispensations of Providence are as compactly perfect towards each individual of mankind as if he were the sole inhabitant of an only world. If Heaven, in its condescension, were to implead at the bar of human reason, and set forth the motives of its dealings towards this man or that, they might, no doubt, be alleged and justified in every particular, without making any reference to the intermingled interests of other men: and it might be shown that, although certain events were in fact followed by consequences much more important to others than to the individual immediately affected, yet they did in the fullest sense belong to the personal discipline of the individual, and must have taken place irrespectively of those foreign consequences.

This perfect fitting and finishing of the machinery of Providence to individual interests, must be premised; yet it is not less true that in almost every event of life the remote consequences vastly outweigh the proximate in actual amount of importance. Every man prospers, or is overthrown;

lives, or dies; not for himself, but that he may sustain those around him; or that he may give them place; and who shall attempt to measure the circle within which are comprised these extensive dependencies? On principles even of mathematical calculation each individual of the human family may be demonstrated to hold in his hand the centre lines of an interminable web-work, on which are sustained the fortunes of multitudes of his successors. These implicated consequences, if summed together, make up therefore a weight of human weal or woe that is reflected back with an incalculable momentum upon the lot of each. Every one is then bound to remember that the personal sufferings or peculiar vicissitudes, or toils through which he is called to pass, are to be estimated and explained only in an immeasurably small proportion if his single welfare is regarded, while their full price and value are not to be computed unless the drops of the morning dew could be numbered.

Immediate proof of that system of interminable connexion which binds together the whole human family may be obtained by every one who will examine the several ingredients of his physical, intellectual and social condition; for he will not find one of these circumstances of his lot that is not, in its substance or quality, directly an effect or consequence of the conduct, or character, or constitution of his progenitors, and of all with

whom he has had to do;—if *they* had been other than they were, *he* must also have been other than he is. And then our predecessors must in like manner trace the qualities of their being to theirs; thus the linking ascends to the common parents of all; and thus must it descend—still spreading as it goes, from the present to the last generation of the children of Adam.

Nor is this direct and obvious kind of influence the only one of which some plain indications are to be discerned; and without at all following the uncertain track of adventurous speculation, it may fairly be surmised that the same law of interminable connexion—a law of moral gravitation, stretches far beyond the limits of the human family, and actually holds in union the great community of intelligent beings. Instances of connexion immensely remote, and yet very real, might be adduced in abundance:—the moral influence of history is of this kind. Whatever actually imparts force or intensity to human motives, and by this means actually determines conduct, may assuredly claim for itself the title and respect due to an efficient cause, and must be deemed to exert an impulsive power over the mind. Now the records of history, how long soever may have been the line of transmission which has brought them to our times, fraught as they are with instances applicable to all the occasions of real life, do thus, in a very perceptible degree, affect the sentiments and mould the

characters of mankind; nor will any one speak slightingly of this species of causation who has compared the intellectual condition of nations rich in history, with that of a people wholly destitute of memorials of past ages. The story of the courage, or constancy, or wisdom of the men of a distant time becomes, in a greater or a less degree, a subsidiary cause of the conduct of the men of each succeeding generation. Thus the few individuals in every age to whom it has happened to live, and act, and speak under the focus of the speculum of history, did actually live, and labour, and suffer for the benefit of mankind in all future times;—just as truly as a father toils for the advantage of his family. And if the whole amount of the influence which has in fact flowed from the example of the wise, the brave, and the good, could have been placed in prophetic vision before them, while in the midst of their arduous course, would not these worthies contentedly and gladly have purchased so immense a wealth of moral power at the price of their personal sufferings?

Here then as a plain matter of fact is an instance of boundless causation, connecting certain individuals with myriads of their species, from age to age, and for ever. It is an instance, we say, and not more: for the voice of history is but a preluding flourish to that voluminous revelation, which shall be made in the great day of consummation, of all that has been acted and suffered upon earth's surface. In that day, when

the books of *universal history* are opened and read, it shall doubtless be found that no particle has been lost of aught that might serve to authenticate the maxims of eternal wisdom, or to vindicate the righteous government of God.—And all shall be written anew, as "with a pen of iron on the rock for ever," and shall stand forth as an imperishable lesson of warning or incitement to after-comers on the theatre of existence.

Whatever degree of solidity may be attributed to considerations of this kind, they are at least sufficiently supported by analogies to give them a decided advantage over those petulant cavils wherewith we are prone to arraign the particular dispensations of Providence towards ourselves. Are such dispensations, when seen in small portions, mysterious and perplexing? How can they be otherwise if, in their completed measurements, they are spread over the creation, and in their issues to endure for ever?

The common phrase—"a mysterious dispensation of Providence," when used as most often it is, contains the very substance of enthusiasm; yet, it must be confessed, of a venial enthusiasm, for the occasions which draw it forth are of a kind that may be admitted to palliate a hasty impropriety of language. To call any event which does not break in upon the known and established order of natural causes—mysterious, is virtually

to assume a previous knowledge of the intentions of the Supreme Ruler; for it is to say that His proceedings have baffled our calculations; and in fact it is only when we have formed anticipations of what *ought* to have been the course of events that we are tempted by sudden reverses to employ so improperly this indefinite expression. All the dispensations of Divine Providence, taken together, may, with perfect propriety, be termed mysterious, since all alike are governed by reasons that are hidden and inscrutable: but it is the height of presumption so to designate some of them *in distinction* from others. For example:—A man eminently gifted by nature for important and peculiar services, and trained to perform them by a long and arduous discipline, and now just entering upon the course of successful beneficence, and perhaps actually holding in his hand the welfare of a family, or a province, or an empire, is suddenly smitten to the earth by disease or accident. Sad ruin of a rare machinery of intellectual and moral power! But while the thoughtless many deplore for an hour their irreparable loss, the thoughtful few muse rather than weep; and in order to conceal from themselves the irreverence of their own repinings, exclaim—"How mysterious are the ways of heaven!" Yes; but in the present instance, what is mysterious? Not that human life should at all periods be liable to disease, or the human frame always vulnerable; for these are conditions

inseparable from the present constitution of our nature; and it is clear that nothing less than a perpetual miracle could exempt any one class of mankind from the common contingencies of physical life. The supposition of any such constant and manifest interposition — rendering a certain description of persons intactible by harm, would be impious as well as absurd. Nothing could suggest to a sane mind an idea of this sort, if it did not gain admittance in the train of those eager forecastings of the ways of God in which persons much addicted to religious meditation are prone to indulge, and which, though they may afford pleasure for a moment, are usually purchased at the cost of relapses into gloomy, or worse than gloomy discontents.

There is a striking incongruity in the fact that the propensity to apply the equivocal term "mysterious," to sudden and afflictive events — like the one just specified, is indulged almost exclusively by the very persons whose professed principles furnish them with a sufficient explanation of such dispensations. If the present state were thought to comprise the beginning and the end of the human system, and if, at the same time, this system be attributed to the Supreme Intelligence, then indeed the prodigious waste and destruction which is continually taking place, not only of the germ of life, but of the rarest and of the most excellent specimens of Divine art, is a solecism which must baffle every attempt

at explanation. Let then the deist who knows of nothing beyond death, talk of the mysteries of Providence; but let not the Christian, who is taught to think little of the present and much of the future, use language of this sort.

A popular misunderstanding of the language of Scripture relative to the future state, has, perhaps, had great influence in enhancing the gloom and perplexity with which Christians are wont to think and speak of sudden and afflictive visitations of Providence.—

Heaven—the ultimate and perfected condition of human nature, is thought of, amidst the toils of life, as an elysium of quiescent bliss, exempt, if not from action, at least from the necessity of action. Meanwhile every one feels that the ruling tendency and the uniform intention of all the arrangements of the present state, and of almost all its casualties, is to generate and to cherish habits of strenuous exertion. Inertness, not less than vice, stamps upon its victim the seal of perdition. The whole order of nature, and all the institutions of society, and the ordinary course of events, and the explicit will of God, declared in His word, concur in opposing that propensity to rest which belongs to the human mind; and combine to necessitate submission to the hard, yet salutary conditions under which alone the most extreme evils may be held in abeyance, and any degree of happiness enjoyed. A task and

duty is to be fulfilled, in discharging which the want of energy is punished even more immediately and more severely than the want of virtuous motives.

Here then is visible a great and serious incongruity between matter of fact and the common anticipations of the future state: it deserves inquiry therefore whether these anticipations are really founded on the evidence of Scripture, or whether they are not rather the mere suggestions of a sickly spiritual luxuriousness. This is not the place for pursuing such an inquiry; but it may be observed, in passing, that those glimpses of the supernal world, which we catch from the Scriptures have in them, certainly, quite as much of the character of history as of poetry, and impart the idea—not that there is less of business in heaven than on earth; but more. Unquestionably the felicity of those beings of a higher order, to whose agency frequent allusions are made by the inspired writers, is not incompatible with the assiduities of a strenuous ministry, to be discharged, according to the best ability of each, in actual and arduous contention with formidable, and perhaps sometimes successful opposition. A poetic notion of angelic agency having in it nothing substantial, nothing necessary, nothing difficult, and which consists only in an unreal show of action and movement, and in which the result would be precisely the same apart from the accompaniment of a swarm of

butterfly youths, must be spurned by reason, as it is unwarranted by Scripture. Scripture does not affirm or imply that the plenitude of divine power is at all in more immediate exercise in the higher world than in this: on the contrary, the revelation so distinctly made of a countless array of intelligent and vigorous agents, designated usually by an epithet of martial signification, precludes such an idea. Why a commission of subalterns:— why an attendance of celestials upon the flight of the bolt of omnipotence? That bolt, when actually flung, needs no coadjutor!

But if there be a real and necessary, not merely a shadowy agency in heaven as well as on earth; and if human nature is destined to act its part in such an economy, then its constitution, and the severe training it undergoes, are at once explained; and then also, the removal of individuals in the very prime of their fitness for useful labour ceases to be impenetrably mysterious. This excellent mechanism of matter and mind, which, beyond any other of His works, declares the wisdom of the Creator, and which, under His guidance, is now passing the season of its first preparation, shall stand up anew from the dust of dissolution, and then, with freshened powers, and with a store of hard-earned and practical wisdom for its guidance, shall essay new labours—we say not perplexities and perils—in the service of God, who by such instruments chooses to accomplish His designs of beneficence. That so prodigious

a waste of the highest qualities should take place, as is implied in the notions which many Christians entertain of the future state, is indeed hard to imagine. The mind of man, formed as it is to be more tenacious of its active habits than even of its moral dispositions, is, in the present state, trained, often at an immense cost of suffering, to the exercise of skill, of forethought, of courage, of patience; and ought it not to be inferred—unless positive evidence contradicts the supposition, that this system of education bears some relation of fitness to the state for which it is an initiation? Shall not the very same qualities which here are so sedulously fashioned and finished, be actually needed and used in that future world of perfection? Surely the idea is inadmissible that an instrument wrought up, at so much expense to a polished fitness for service, is destined to be suspended for ever on the palace walls of heaven, as a glittering bauble, no more to make proof of its temper!

Perhaps a pious, but needless jealousy, lest the honour due to Him "who worketh all in all" should be in any degree compromised, has had influence in concealing from the eyes of Christians, the importance attributed in the Scriptures to subordinate agency; and thus, by a natural consequence, has impoverished and enfeebled our ideas of the heavenly state. But assuredly it is only while encompassed by the dimness and errors of the present life that there can be any

danger of attributing to the creature the glory due to the Creator. When once with open eye that "excellent glory" has been contemplated, then shall it be understood that the divine wisdom is incomparably more honoured by the skilful and faithful performances, and by the cheerful toils of agents who have been fashioned and fitted for service, than it could be by the bare exertions of irresistible power: and then, when the absolute dependence of creatures is thoroughly felt— may the beautiful orders of the heavenly hierarchy, rising and still rising towards perfection, be seen and admired without hazard of forgetting Him who alone is absolutely perfect, and who is the only fountain and first cause of whatever is excellent.

The Scriptures do indeed most explicitly declare, not only that virtue will be inamissible in heaven, but that its happiness will be unalloyed by fear, or pain, or want. But the mental associations formed in the present state make it so difficult to disjoin the idea of suffering and of sorrow from that of labour, and of arduous and difficult achievement, that we are prone to exclude action as well as pain from our idea of the future blessedness. Yet assuredly these notions may be separated; and if it be possible to imagine a perfect freedom from selfish solicitudes — a perfect acquiescence in the will, and a perfect confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness of God: then also may we conceive of toils without

sadness, of perplexities without perturbations, and of difficult, or perilous, service without despondencies or fear. The true felicity of beings furnished with moral sensibilities, must consist in the full play of the emotions of love, fixed on the centre of good; and this kind of happiness is unquestionably compatible with any external condition, not positively painful: perhaps even another step might be taken; but the argument does not need it. Yet it should be remembered, that, in many signal and well-attested instances, the fervour of the religious affections has almost or entirely obliterated the consciousness of physical suffering, and has proved its power to vanquish every inferior emotion, and to fill the heart with heaven, even amid the utmost intensities of pain. Much more then may these affections, when freed from every shackle, when invigorated by an assured possession of endless life, and when heightened by the immediate vision of the supreme excellence, yield a fulness of joy, consistently with many vicissitudes of external position.

Considerations such as these, if at all borne out by evidence of Scripture, may properly have place in connexion with the topic of this section; for it is evident that the harassing perplexities which arise from the present dispensations of Providence might be greatly relieved by habitually entertaining anticipations of the future state, somewhat less imbecile and luxurious than those commonly admitted by Christians.

SECTION VII.

ENTHUSIASM OF BENEFICENCE.

To say that the principle of disinterested benevolence had never been known among men before the publication of Christianity would be an exaggeration;—an exaggeration similar to that of affirming that the doctrine of immortality was new to mankind when taught by our Lord. In truth, the one had, in every age, been imperfectly practised, and the other dimly supposed: yet neither the one principle nor the other existed in sufficient strength to be the source of substantial benefit to mankind. But Christ, while he emphatically "brought life and immortality to light," and so claimed to be the author of hope for man, did also with such effect lay the hand of his healing power upon the human heart—long palsied by sensualities and selfishness, that it has ever since shed forth a fountain of active kindness, largely available for the relief of want and misery.

As matter of history, unquestionable and conspicuous, Christianity has in every age fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and redeemed the captive, and visited the sick. It has put

to shame the atrocities of the ancient popular amusements, and annihilated sanguinary rites, and brought slavery into disesteem and disuse, and abolished excruciating punishments: it has even softened the ferocity of war; and, in a word, is seen constantly at work, edging away oppressions, and moving on towards the perfect triumph which avowedly it meditates—that of removing from the earth every woe which the inconsideration, or the selfishness, or the malignancy of man inflicts upon his fellows.

It remains then to ask by what *special* means has Christianity effected these ameliorations? and it will be found that the power and success of the new principle of benevolence, taught in the Scriptures, are not more remarkable than are its constitution and its ingredients:—Christian philanthropy, though it takes up among its elements the native benevolence of the human heart, is a compound principle, essentially differing from the spontaneous sympathies of our nature. Now, as this new and composite benevolence has, by a trial of eighteen centuries, and under every imaginable diversity of circumstances, proved its practical efficiency, and its immense superiority over the crude elementary principle of kindness, it would be a violation of the acknowledged methods of modern science to adhere pertinaciously to the old and inefficient element, and to contemn the improved principle. All we have to do on an occasion wherein the welfare of

our fellows is so deeply interested, is to take care that our own benevolence, and the benevolence which we recommend to others, is of the true and genuine sort—in other words, that it is indeed—Christian. If, as every one would profess, we desire to live not for selfish pleasure, but to promote the happiness of others—if we would become, not idle well-wishers to our species—not closet philanthropists, dreaming of impracticable reforms, and grudging the cost of effective relief, but real benefactors to mankind, we must take up the lessons of New Testament philanthropy, just as they lie on the page before us, and without imagining simpler methods, follow humbly in the track of experience. By this book alone have men been effectively taught to do good.

A low rate of activity, prompted merely by the spontaneous kindness of the heart, may easily take place without incurring the danger of enthusiastical excesses; but how is enough of moral movement to be obtained for giving impulse to a course of arduous and perilous labours, such as the woes of mankind often call for, and yet without generating the extravagances of a false excitement? This is a problem solved only by the Christian scheme, and in briefly enumerating the peculiarities of the benevolence which it inspires, we shall not fail to catch a glimpse, at least, of that profound skill which makes provision, on the one side against inertness and selfishness; and on the against enthusiasm.

The *peculiarities* of Christian philanthropy are such as these; it is Vicarious; Obligatory; Rewardable; Subordinate to an efficient agency, and an expression of grateful love.

I. The great principle of vicarious suffering, which forms the centre of Christianity, spreads itself through the subordinate parts of the system, and is the pervading, if not the invariable law of Christian beneficence.

The spontaneous sympathies of human nature, when they are vigorous enough to produce the fruits of charity, rest on an expectation of an opposite kind; for we first seek to dispel from our own bosoms the uneasy sensation of pity; then look for the gratitude of the wretch we have solaced, and for the approbation of spectators; and then take a sweet after-draught of self-complacency. But the Christian virtue of benenificence takes its stand altogether on another ground; and its doctrine is, that, whoever would remedy misery must himself suffer; and that the pains of the vicarious benefactor are generally to bear proportion to the extent or malignity of the evils he labours to remove. So that while the philanthropist who undertakes the cure only of the transient ills of the present life, may encounter no greater amount of toils or discouragements than are amply recompensed by the immediate gratifications of successful benevolence, he who, with a due sense of the greatness

of the enterprise, devotes himself to the removal of the moral wretchedness in which human nature is involved, will find that the sad quality of these deeper woes is in a manner reflected back upon himself; and that to touch the substantial miseries of degenerate man is to come within the infection of infinite sorrow.

And this is the law of success in the Christian ministry, that highest work of philanthropy. Every right-minded and heaven-commissioned minister of religion is "baptized with the baptism wherewith his Lord was baptized." In an inferior, yet a real sense, he is, like his Lord, a vicarious person, and has freely undergone a suretyship for the immortal welfare of his fellowmen. He has charged himself with a responsibility that can never be absolutely acquitted while any power of exertion, or faculty of endurance is held back from the service. The interests which rest in his hand, and depend on his skill and fidelity—depend, as truly as if divine agency had no part in the issue—are as momentous as infinity can make them, nor are to be promoted without a willingness to do and to bear the utmost of which humanity is capable. Though the vicar of Christ be not unconditionally responsible for the happy result of his labours, he is clearly bound, both by the terms of his engagement and the very quality of the work, to surrender whatever he may possess that has in it a virtue to purchase success; and he knows that,

by the great law of the spiritual world, the suffering of a substitute enters into the procedures of redemption.

He who "took our sorrows and bore our griefs," left, for the instruction of his servants, a perfect model of what should ordinarily be—a life of beneficence. Every circumstance of privation, of discouragement, of insult, of deadly hostility, which naturally fell in the way of a ministry like his, exercised among a people, profligate, malignant, and fanatical, was endured by him as submissively as if no extraordinary powers of relief or defence had been at his disposal.

On the very same conditions of unmitigated toil and suffering he consigned the publication of his religion to his Apostles:—"Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake:—Whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service:—Behold, I send you forth as sheep among wolves." Though endowed with an opulence of supernatural power for the attestation of their commission, the Apostles possessed none for the alleviation of their own distresses—none which might tend to generate a personal enthusiasm by leading them to think that they, as individuals, were the darlings of heaven. And in fact they daily found themselves, even while wielding the arm of omnipotence, exposed to the extremest pressures of want, to pain, to destitution, to contempt. "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked,

and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place." Such was the deplorable lot—such to his last year of houseless wanderings—houseless except when a dungeon was his home—of the most honoured of heaven's agents on earth. Such was the life of the most successful of all philanthropists!

Nor have the conditions of eminent service been relaxed:—the value of souls is not lowered; and as the "sacrifice once offered" for the sins of the world remains in undiminished efficacy, so, in the process of diffusing the infinite benefit, the rule originally established continues in force; and although reasons drawn from the diversity of character and of natural strength, among those who are the servants of God, may occasion great apparent differences in the amount of suffering severally endured by them, it is always true that the path of Christian beneficence is more beset than the common walks of life with disheartening reverses. Whoever freely takes up the cause of the wretched, is left to feel the grievous pressure of the burden. The frustration of his plans by the obstinate folly of those whom he would fain serve—the apathy, the remissness, or the sinister oppositions of professed coadjutors—the dangerous hostility of profligate power—and worse than all, the secret misgivings of an exhausted spirit; these, and whatever other instruments of torture Disappointment may hold in her hand or have in reserve, are the furniture of the theatre on

which the favourite virtue of heaven is to pass its trial.

But this stern law of vicarious charity is altogether opposed to the expectations of inexperienced and ardent minds. Among the few who devote themselves zealously to the service of mankind, a large proportion derive their activity from that constitutional fervour which is the physical cause of enthusiasm. In truth, a propensity rather to indulge the illusions of hope, than to calculate probabilities, may seem almost a necessary qualification for those who, in this world of abounding evil, are to devise the means of checking its triumphs. To raise fallen humanity from its degradation—to rescue the oppressed—to deliver the needy—to save the lost—are enterprises, for the most part, so little recommended by a fair promise of success, that few will engage in them but those who, by a happy infirmity of the reasoning faculty, are prone to hope where cautious men despond.

Thus furnished for their work by a constitutional contempt of frigid prudence, and engaged cordially in services which seem to give them a peculiar interest in the favour of heaven, it is only natural that benevolent enthusiasts should cherish secret, if not avowed hopes, of extraordinary aids and interpositions of a kind not compatible with the constitution of the present state, and not warranted by promise of Scripture. Or if the kind-hearted visionary neither asks nor

expects any peculiar protection of his person, nor any exemption from the common hazards and ills of life, yet he clings with fond pertinacity to the hope of a semi-miraculous interference on those occasions in which the work, rather than the agent, is in peril. Even the genuineness of his benevolence leads the amiable enthusiast into this error. To achieve the good he has designed does indeed occupy all his heart, to the exclusion of every selfish thought:—what price of personal suffering would he not pay, might he so purchase the needful miracle of help! How piercing then is the anguish of his soul when that help is withheld; when his fair hopes and fair designs are overthrown by an hostility that might have been restrained, or by a casualty that might have been diverted!

Few, perhaps, who suffer chagrins like this, altogether avoid a relapse into religious—we ought to say irreligious, despondency. The first fault—that of misunderstanding the unalterable rules of the divine government, is followed by a worse—that of fretting against them. When the sharpness of disappointment disperses enthusiasm, the whole moral constitution often becomes infected with the gall of discontent. Querulous regrets take place of active zeal; and at length vexation, much more than a real exhaustion of strength, renders the once laborious philanthropist "weary in well doing."

And yet, not seldom, a happy renovation of

motives takes place in consequence of the failures to which the enthusiast has exposed himself. Benevolent enterprises were commenced, perhaps, in all the fervour of exorbitant hopes;—the course of nature was to be diverted, and a new order of things to take place, in which, what human efforts failed to accomplish, should be achieved by the ready aid of heaven. But Disappointment—as merciless to the venial errors of the good as to the mischievous plots of the wicked, scatters the project in a moment. Then the selfish, and the inert, exult; and the half-wise pick up fragments from the desolation, wherewith to patch their favourite maxims of frigid prudence with new proofs in point! Meanwhile, by grace given from above in the hour of despondency, the enthusiast gains a portion of true wisdom from defeat. Though robbed of his fondly-cherished hopes, he has not been stripped of his sympathies, and these soon prompt him to begin anew his labours, on principles of a more substantial sort. Warned not again to expect miraculous or extraordinary aids to supply the want of caution, he consults prudence with even a religious scrupulosity; for he has learned to think her voice, if not misunderstood, to be in fact the voice of God. And now he avenges himself upon Disappointment, by abstaining almost from hope. A sense of responsibility which quells physical excitement is his strength. He relies indeed upon the divine aid,

yet not for extraordinary interpositions, but for grace to be faithful. Thus better furnished for arduous exertion, a degree of substantial success is granted to his renewed toils and prayers. And while the indolent, and the over-cautious, and the cold-hearted, remain what they were; or have become more inert, more timid, and more selfish than before, the subject of their self-complacent pity has not only accomplished some important service for mankind, but has himself acquired a temper which fits him to take high rank among the thrones and dominions of the upper world.

II. Christian philanthropy is obligatory.

Natural benevolence is prone to claim the liberty and the merit that belong to pure spontaneity, and spurns the idea of duty or necessity. This claim might be allowed if the free emotions of kindness were sufficiently common, and sufficiently vigorous, to meet the large and constant demands of want and misery. But the contrary is the fact; and if it were not that an authoritative requisition, backed by the most solemn sanctions, laid its hand upon the sources of eleemosynary aid, the revenues of mercy would be slender indeed. Even the few who act from the impulse of the noblest motives, are urged on and sustained in their course of beneficence by a latent recollection that, though they move freely in advancing, they have no real liberty to draw

back. If the entire amount of advantage which has accrued to the necessitous from the influence of Christianity could be computed, it would, no doubt, be found, that by far the larger share has been contributed—not by the few who might have done the same without impulsion; but by the many, whose selfishness could never have been broken up except by the most peremptory appeals. To insure, therefore, its large purpose of good-will to man, the law of Christ spreads out its claims very far beyond the circle of mere pity, or natural kindness; and in the most absolute terms demands, for the use of the poor, the ignorant, the wretched—and demands from every one who names the name of Christ, the whole residue of talent, wealth, time, that may remain after primary claims have been satisfied. On this ground, when the zeal of self-denying benevolence has laid down its last mite, it does not deem itself to have exceeded the extent of Christian duty; but cheerfully assents to that rule of computing service which affirms that "we, when we have done all, are unprofitable servants; having performed only what we were commanded."

Manifestly for the purpose of giving the highest possible force and solemnity to that sense of obligation which impels the Christian to abound in every good work, the ostensible proof of religious sincerity, to be adduced in the momentous procedures of the last judgment, is made

to consist in the fact of a life of beneficence. Those, and those only, shall inherit the prepared blessedness, who shall be found to have nourished, and clothed, and visited the Lord in his representatives — the poor. The "cursed" are those who have grudged the cost of mercy.

And it is not only true that the funds of charity have been, in every age, immensely augmented by these strong representations, and have far exceeded the amount which spontaneous compassion would ever have contributed, but the very character of beneficence has been new modelled by them. In the mind of every well-instructed Christian, a feeling compounded of a compunctious sense of inadequate performance, and a solemn sense of the extent of the divine requirements, repugnates and subdues those self-gratulations, those giddy deliriums, and that vain ambition, which beset a course of active and successful beneficence. This remarkable arrangement of the Christian ethics, by which the largest possible contributions and the utmost possible exertions are demanded in a tone of comprehensive authority, seems — besides its other uses, particularly intended to quash the natural enthusiasm of active zeal. It is a strong antagonist principle in the mechanism of motives, insuring an equilibrium, however great may be the intensity of action. We are thus taught that, as there can be no supererogation in works of mercy, so neither can there be exultation.

Nothing, it is manifest, but humility, becomes a servant who barely acquits his duty.

Let it, for example, have been given to a man to receive superior mental endowments—force of understanding, solidity of judgment, and richness of imagination, command of language, and graces of utterance;—a soul fraught with expansive kindness, and not more kind than courageous;—and let him, thus furnished by nature, have enjoyed the advantages of rank and wealth, and secular influence; and let it have been his lot, in the prime of life, to be stationed just on the fortunate centre of peculiar opportunities: and then let it have happened that a fourth part of the human family—cruelly maltreated, stood as clients at his door, imploring help: and let him, in the very teeth of ferocious selfishness, have achieved deliverance for these suffering millions, and have given a deadly blow to the Moloch of blood and rapacity: and let him have been lifted to the heavens on the loud acclamations of all civilized nations, and blessed amid the sighs and joys of the ransomed poor; and his name diffused, like a charm, through every barbarous dialect of a continent:—Let all this signal felicity have belonged to the lot of a Christian—a Christian well taught in the principles of his religion; nevertheless, in the midst of his honest joy, he will find place rather for humiliation than for that vain excitement and exultation wherewith a man of merely natural

benevolence would not fail, in like circumstances, to be intoxicated. Without at all allowing the exaggerations of an affected humility, the triumphant philanthropist confesses that he is nothing; and far from deeming himself to have surpassed the requirements of the law of Christ, feels that he has done less than his duty.

Christian philanthropy, thus boldly and solidly based on a sense of unlimited obligation, acquires a character essentially differing from that of spontaneous kindness; and while, as a source of relief to the wretched, it is rendered immensely more copious, is, at the same time, secured against the flatteries of self-love, and the excesses of enthusiasm, by the solemn sanctions of an unbounded responsibility.

III. A nice balancing of motives is obtained from an opposite quarter in the Christian doctrine of the rewardableness of works of mercy. This doctrine, than which no article of religion stands out more prominently on the surface of the New Testament, having been early abused, to the hurt of the fundamentals of piety, has, in the modern Church, been almost lost sight of and fallen into disuse, or has even become liable to obloquy; so that to insist upon it plainly has incurred a charge of Pelagianism, or of Romanism, or of some such error. This misunderstanding must be dispelled before Christian philanthropy can revive in full force.

Amidst the awful reserve which envelops the announcement of a future life by our Lord and his ministers, three ideas, continually recurring, are to be gathered with sufficient clearness from their hasty allusions. The *First* is, that the future life will be the fruit of the present, as if by a natural sequence of cause and effect.— "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." The *Second* is, that the future harvest, though of like species and quality with the seed, will be immensely disproportioned to it in amount.— "The things seen are temporal; but the things unseen are eternal;" and the sufferings of the present time are to be followed by "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" and those who have been "faithful over a few things, will have rule over many." The *Third* is, that though the disparity between the present reward and the future recompense will be vast and incalculable, yet will there obtain a most exact rule of correspondence between the one and the other, so that from the hands of the "righteous Judge" every man will receive "severally according as his work has been." Nor shall even "a cup of cold water," given in Christian love, be omitted in that accurate account;—but the giver shall "by no means lose his *reward*."

Such are the explicit and intelligible engagements of Him whose commands are never far separated from his promises. It cannot then be deemed a becoming part of Christian temper to

indulge a scrupulous hesitancy in accepting and in acting upon the faith of these declarations. And as there is no real incompatibility or clashing of motives in the Christian system, any delicacy that may be felt, as if the hope of reward might interfere with a due sense of obligation to sovereign grace, must spring from an obscured and faulty perception of scriptural doctrines. The intelligent Christian, on the contrary, when, in simplicity of heart, he calculates upon the promises of Heaven; and when, with a distinct reckoning of the "great gain" of such an investment, he "lays up for himself treasures that cannot fail;" is, at the same time, taught and impelled by the strongest emotions of the heart, to connect his hope of recompense with his hope of pardon. And when the one class of ideas is thus linked to the other, he perceives that the economy which establishes a system of rewards for present services can be nothing else than an arbitrary arrangement of sovereign goodness, resolving itself altogether into the grace of the mediatorial scheme. The retribution, how accurately soever it may be measured out according to the work performed, must, in its whole amount, be still a pure gratuity;—not less so than is the gift of immortal life conferred without probation upon the aborigines of heaven. The zealous and faithful servant who enters upon his reward after a long term of labour, and the infant of a day, who flits at once from the

womb to the skies, alike receive the boon of endless bliss in virtue of their relationship to the second Adam—"the Lord from heaven." Nevertheless this boon shall conspicuously appear, in the one case, to be the apportioned wages of service—an exact recompense, measured, and weighed, and doled out in due discharge of an explicit engagement; while in the other, it can be nothing but a sovereign bestowment.

But it is manifest that this doctrine of future recompense, when held in connexion with the fundamental principle of Christianity—justification by faith, tends directly to allay and disperse those excitements which naturally spring up with the zeal of active benevolence. The series or order of sentiments is this :—

The Christian philanthropist, if well instructed, dares not affect indifference to the promised reward, or pretend to be more disinterested than Apostles, who laboured, "knowing that in due time they should reap." He cannot think himself free to overlook a motive which is distinctly held out before him in the Scriptures :—to do so were an impious arrogance. And yet, if he does accept the promise of recompense, and takes it up as an inducement to diligence, he is compelled by a sense of the manifold imperfections of his services to fall back constantly upon the divine mercies as they are assured to transgressors in Christ. These humbling sentiments utterly refuse to cohere with the complacencies of a selfish

and vain-glorious philanthropy, and necessitate a subdued tone of feeling. Thus the very height and expansion of the Christian's hopes send the root of humility deep and wide; the more his bosom heaves with the hope of "the exceeding great reward," the more is it quelled by the consciousness of demerit. The counterpoise of opposing sentiments is so managed, that elevation cannot take place on the one side without an equal depression on the other; and by the counteraction of antagonist principles the emotions of zeal may reach the highest possible point, while full provision is made for correcting the vertigo of enthusiasm.

If, in the early ages of the Church, the expectation of future reward was abused to the damage of fundamental principles, in modern times, an ill-judged zeal for the integrity of those principles has produced an almost avowed jealousy towards many explicit declarations of Scripture: thus the nerves of labour are either relaxed by the withdrawment of proper stimulants, or absolutely severed by the bold hand of antinomian delusion.

Moreover—a course of Christian beneficence is one peculiarly exposed to reverses, to obstructions, and often to active hostility; and if the zeal of the philanthropist be in any considerable degree alloyed with the sinister motives of personal vanity, or be inflamed with enthusiasm, these reverses produce despondency; or opposition and hostility kindle corrupt zeal into

fanatical violence. The injection of a chemical test does not more surely bring out the element with which it has affinity, than does opposition, in an attempt to do good, make conspicuous the presence of unsound motives, if any such have existed. Has it not happened that when benevolent enterprises have consisted in a direct attack upon systems of cruel or fraudulent oppression, the quality of the zeal that has actuated many in lending their clamours to the champions of humanity, has become manifest when the issue seemed doubtful, or when the machinations of diabolical knavery gained a momentary triumph? Then, too often, the partisans of truth and mercy, forgetful of their principles, have broke out almost into the violence of political faction, and hardly scrupled to employ the dark methods which faction loves.

But there is a delicacy, a reserve, a sobriety, a humbleness of heart, belonging to the hope of heavenly recompense, which powerfully repels the malign emotions. Who can imagine the circumstances and feelings of the great day of final reward, and think of hearing the approving voice of Him who "searches the heart," and at the same time be told by conscience that the zeal which gives life to his labours in the cause of the oppressed ferments with the gall and acrimony of worldly animosity—that this zeal prompts him to indulge in exaggerations, if not to propagate calumnies; and exults much more in the over-

throw of the oppressor, than in the redemption of the captive? If the greatness of the future reward proves that it must be altogether "of grace, not of debt," then, unquestionably, must it demand in the recipient a temper purified from the leaven of malice and hatred. Thus does the Christian doctrine of future reward correct the evil passions incident to a course of benevolence.

IV. Christian beneficence is the subordinate instrument of a higher and efficient agency. "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Such, on the scriptural plan, are the conditions of all labour, undertaken from the motives of religious benevolence. But the besetting sin of natural benevolence is self-complacency and presumption. It is perhaps as hard to find sanctimoniousness apart from hypocrisy, or bashfulness without pride, as to meet with active and enterprising philanthropy not tainted by the spirit of overweening vanity. The kind-hearted schemer, fertile in devices for beguiling mankind into virtue, and rich in petty ingenuities — always well-intended, and seldom well-imagined, verily believes that his machineries of instruction or reform require only to be put fairly in play, and they will bring heaven upon earth.

But Christianity, if it does not sternly frown upon these novelties, does not encourage them; and while it depicts the evils that destroy the

happiness of man as of much more deep and inveterate malignity than that they should be remedied by this or that specious method, devised yesterday, tried to-day, and abandoned to-morrow, most explicitly confines the hope of success to those who possess the temper of mind which is proper to a dependant and subordinate agent. All presumptuous confidence in the efficiency of second causes is utterly repugnant to the spirit that should actuate a Christian philanthropist; and the more so when the good which he strives to achieve is of the highest kind.

V. Lastly, Christian beneficence is an expression of grateful love. The importance attributed throughout the New Testament to active charity is not more remarkable than is this peculiarity which merges the natural and spontaneous sentiments of good-will and compassion towards our fellows in an emotion of a deeper kind, and virtually denies merit and genuineness to every feeling, how amiable soever it may appear, if it does not thus fall into subordination to that devout affection which we owe to Him who redeemed us by his sufferings and death. The reasons of this remarkable constitution of motives it is not impossible to perceive. For, in the first place, it is evident that the love of the Supreme Being can exist in the heart only as a *dominant* sentiment, drawing every other affection into its wake. Even the softest and purest tendernesses

of our nature must yield precedence to the higher attachment of the soul;—he who does not love Christ more than father and mother, wife and children, loves him not. Much more then must the sentiment of general benevolence own the same subordination. Again; as the promise of future recompense, and the doctrine of dependance upon divine agency, elevate the motives of benevolence from the level of earth to that of heaven, they would presently assume a character of dry and visionary abstraction, unless animated by an emotion of love belonging to the same sphere. Zeal without love were a preposterous and dangerous passion: but Christian zeal must be warmed by no other love than that of Him who, "for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich."

It has already been said that religious enthusiasm takes its commencement from the point where the emotions of the heart are transmuted into mere pleasures of the imagination, and assuredly the excitements incident to a course of beneficence are very fit to furnish occasions to such a transmutation. But the capital motive of grateful affection to Him who has redeemed us from sin and sorrow, prevents, so far as it is in active operation, this deadening of the heart, and consequent quickening of the imagination. The poor and the wretched are the Lord's representatives on earth; and in doing them good

we cherish and express feelings which otherwise must lie latent, or become vague, seeing that He to whom they relate is remote from our senses.

This motive of affection to the Lord makes provision, moreover, against the despondencies that attend a want of success: for though a servant of Christ may, to his life's end, labour in vain—though the objects of his disinterested kindness should "turn and rend him;" yet has he, not the less, approved his loyalty and love—approved it even more conspicuously than those can have done whose labours are continually cheered and rewarded by prosperous results. Affection, in such cases, has sustained the trial, not merely of toil, but of fruitless toil, than which none can be more severe to a zealous and devoted heart.

It appears then that Christian benevolence contains within itself such a balancing of motives, as leaves room for the utmost imaginable enhancements of zeal without hazard of extravagance. In truth, it is easy to perceive that the religion of the Bible has in reserve a spring of movement—a store of intrinsic vigour, ready to be developed in a manner greatly surpassing what has hitherto been seen. Such a day of developement shall ere long arrive, the time of the triumph of divine principles shall come, and a style of true heroism be displayed, of which the seeds have been long sown, of which some

samples have already been furnished, and which waits only the promised refreshment from above to appear, not in rare instances only, but as the common produce of Christianity.

In the present state of the world and of the Church, when communications are so instantaneous, and when attention is so much alive to whatever concerns the welfare of mankind, if it might be imagined that a great and sudden extension of Christianity should take place in the regions of superstition and polytheism ; and that yet no corresponding improvement of piety, no purifying, no refreshment, no enhancement of motives, should occur in the home of Christianity, there is reason to believe that the influx of excitement might generate a blaze of destructive enthusiasm. If every day had its tidings of wonder—the fall of popery in the neighbouring nations — the abandonment of the Mahometan delusion by people after people in Asia — the rejection of idols by China and India ; and if these surprising changes, instead of producing the cordial joy of gladdened faith, were gazed at merely with an unholy and prurient curiosity, and were thundered forth from platforms by heartless declaimers, and were grasped at by visionary interpreters of futurity ; then, from so much agitation, unconnected by a proportionate increase of genuine piety, new prodigies of error would presently start up, new sects break away from the body, new hatreds be kindled ;

and nothing scarcely be left in the place of Christianity but dogmas and contentions. Thus the cradle of religion in modern times would become its grave.

But a far happier anticipation may with reason be indulged; for it may well be believed that the same Benignant Influence, which is to remove the covering of gross ignorance from the nations, shall, at the same moment, scatter the dimness that still hovers over the Church in its most favoured home;—then, and under that influence, the fervours of Christian zeal may reach the height even of a seraphic energy, without enthusiasm.

SECTION VIII.

SKETCH OF THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH.

An intelligent Christian, fraught with scriptural principles in their simplicity and purity, but hitherto uninformed of Church history, who should peruse discursively the ecclesiastical writers of the age of Jerom, Ambrose, and Gregory Nyssen, would presently recoil with an emotion of disappointment, perplexity, and alarm. That within a period which does not exceed the stretch of oral tradition, the religion of the Apostles should have so much changed its character, and so much have lost its beauty, he could not have supposed possible. He has heard indeed of the corruptions of popery, and of the enormous abuses prevalent in "the dark ages;" and he has been told too, by those who had an argument to prop, that the era of the secular prosperity of the church was that also of the incipient corruption of religion. But he finds in fact that there is scarcely an error of doctrine, or an absurdity of practice, ordinarily attributed to the Popes

and councils of later times, and commonly included in the indictment against Rome, which may not, in its elements, or even in a developed form, be traced to the writings of those whose ancestors, at the third or fourth remove only, were the hearers of Paul and John.

But after the first shock of such an unprepared perusal of the Fathers has passed, and when calm reflection has returned, and especially when, by taking up these early writers from the commencement, the progression of decay and perversion has been gradually and distinctly contemplated, then, though the disappointment will in great part remain, the appalling surmises at first engendered in the modern reader's mind, will be dispelled, and he will even be able to pursue his course of reading with pleasure, and to derive from it much solid instruction.—Considerations such as the following will naturally present themselves to him in mitigation of his first impressions.

While contemplating in their infant state those notions and practices—of the third century, for example, which afterwards swelled into enormous evils, it is difficult not to view them as if loaded with the blame of their after issues; and then it is hard not to attribute to their originators and promoters the accumulated criminality that should be shared in small portions by the men of many following generations. But the individuals thus unfairly dealt by, far from forecasting the consequences of the sentiments and usages they

favoured—far from viewing them, as we do, darkened by the cloud of mischiefs heaped upon them in after times, saw the same objects bright and fair in the recommendatory gleam of a pure and a venerated age. The very abuses which make the twelfth century abhorrent on the page of history, were, in the fourth, fragrant with the practice and suffrage of a blessed company of primitive confessors. The remembered saints, who had given their bodies to the flames, had also lent their voice and example to those unwise excesses which at length drove true religion from the earth. Untaught by experience, the ancient church surmised not of the occult tendencies of the course it pursued, nor should it be loaded with consequences which human sagacity could not well have foreseen.*

Again.—Human nature, which is far more uniform than may be imagined, when suddenly it is

* Each of the great corruptions of later ages took its rise in the first, second, or third century, in a manner which it would be harsh to say was deserving of strong reprehension. Thus the secular domination exercised by the bishops, and at length supremely by the bishop of Rome, may be traced very distinctly to the proper respect paid by the people, even in the apostolic age, to the disinterested wisdom of their bishops in deciding their worldly differences.—The worship of images, the invocation of saints, and the superstition of relics, were but expansions of the natural feeling of veneration and affection cherished towards the memory of those who had suffered and died for the truth.—And thus, in like manner, the errors and abuses of monkery all sprang, by imperceptible augmentations from sentiments perfectly natural to the sincere and devout Christian in times of persecution, disorder, and general corruption of morals.

beheld under some new aspect of time and country, is also susceptible of much greater diversities of habit and feeling than those are willing to believe who have seen it on no side but one. This double lesson, taught by history and travel, should be well learned by every one who undertakes to estimate the merits of men that have lived in remote times, and under other skies.

A caution against the influence of narrow prejudice is obviously more needful in relation to the persons and practices of ancient Christianity, than when common history is the subject of inquiry; for in whatever relates to religion, every one carries with him not merely the ordinary prepossessions of time and country, but an unbending standard of conduct and temper, which he is forward to compare in his particular manner with whatever offends his notions of right. But though the rule of Scripture morals is unchangeable, and must be applied with uncompromising impartiality to human nature under every variety of circumstance, yet is it impracticable, at the distance of upwards of a thousand years, so fully to calculate those circumstances, and so to perceive the motives of conduct, as is necessary for estimating fairly the innocence or the criminality of particular actions or habits of life. The question of abstract fitness, and that of personal blameworthiness, should ever be kept apart: at least they should be kept apart when it is asked—and we are often tempted to ask it in the perusal of

Church history—"May such men be deemed Christians, who acted and wrote thus and thus?" Before a doubt of this kind could be solved satisfactorily, we must know—what can never be known till the day of universal discovery—how much of imperfection and obliquity may consist with the genuineness of real piety; and again how much of real obliquity there might be under the actual circumstances of the case, in the conduct in question. Who can doubt that if the memorials of the present times, copious, and yet inadequate as they must be, shall remain to a distant age, they will offer similar perplexities to the future reader, who amidst his frequent admiration or approval, will be compelled to exclaim—"But how may we think these men to have been Christians?" Christianity is in gradual process of reforming the principles and practices of mankind, and when the sanative operation shall have advanced some several stages beyond its present point, the notions and usages of our day, compared with the commands of Christ *as then understood*, will, no doubt, seem incredibly defective.

Perhaps it may be said, that in all matters of sentiment depending on physical temperament, and on modes of life, the people of the British islands are less qualified to sympathize with the nations of antiquity than almost any other people of Christendom; and perhaps, also, by national arrogance and pertinacity of taste,

we are less ready to bend indulgently to usages unlike our own than any other people. Stiff in the resoluteness of an exaggerated notion of the right of private judgment, we compare all things unsparingly with the one standard of belief and practice, or rather with our particular pattern of that standard, and do not, until our better nature prevails, own brotherhood with Christians of another complexion and costume. A somewhat austere good sense, belonging, first to the haughtiness and energy of the English character, then to the liberality of our political institutions, and lastly, but not least, to the all-pervading spirit and habits of trade, renders the style of the early Christian writers much more distasteful to us than it has proved to Christians of other countries. Moreover, recent enhancements of the national character, resulting from the diffusion of the physical sciences, and from the more extended prevalence of commercial feelings, have placed those writers at a point much further removed from our predilections than that at which they stood a century ago.

But again: in abatement of the chagrin which a well-instructed Christian must feel in first opening the remains of ecclesiastical literature, it must be remembered, that these works offer a very defective image of the state of religion at the era of their production; that is to say, of religion in its recesses, which are truly the

homes of Christianity. Those who *write* are by no means always those among the ministers of religion, whom it would be judicious to select as the best samples of the spirit of their times. Moreover, it is the taste of a following age that has determined which among the writers of the preceding period should be transmitted to posterity; and in many instances, it is manifest, that a depraved preference has given literary canonization to authors whose ambition was much rather to shine as masters of a florid eloquence, than to feed the flock of Christ. It were therefore an egregious error to suppose that the spiritual character of the Church lies broadly on the surface of its extant literature: on the contrary, charity may reasonably find large room for pleasing conjectures relative to obscure piety, of which no traces are to be found on the pages of saints and bishops. The record of the spiritual church is "on high," not in the tomes that make our libraries proud.

These and other considerations, which will present themselves to a candid and intelligent mind, cannot but remove much of the embarrassment and disrelish that are likely to attend a first converse with ancient divinity. And the pious reader will proceed with heartfelt satisfaction to collect abundant evidence of the fact, which some modern sophists have so much laboured to obscure, that the great principles of revealed religion, as now understood by the mass

of Christians, were then clearly and firmly held by the body of the Church. And he will rejoice also to meet with not less abundant and satisfactory proofs of the energy, purity, and intenseness of practical Christianity among a large number of those who made profession of the name.

Nevertheless, after every fair allowance has been made, and every indulgence given to diversity of circumstance, and after the errors and disgraces of our own times have been placed in counterpoise to those of the ancient Church, there will remain glaring indications of a deep-seated corruption of religious sentiment, leaving hardly a single feeling proper to the Christian life in its purity and simplicity. It is not heresy; it is not the denial of the principal scriptural doctrines, that is to be charged on the ancient church;—the body of divinity held its integrity. Nor is it the want of heroic virtue that we lament. But a transmutation of the objects of the devout affections into objects of *imaginative delectation* had taken place—had rendered the piety of a numerous class purely fictitious—had tinged, more or less, with idealism, the religious sentiments of all but a few, and had opened the way by which, at length, entered the dense and fatal delusions of a superstition so gross as hardly to retain a redeeming quality.

Not a few of the Christians of the third century, and multitudes in the fourth and fifth—

especially among the recluses, having lost the forcible and genuine feeling of guilt and danger proper to those who confess themselves transgressors of the Divine Law, and in consequence become blind to the real purport of the Gospel, fixed their gaze upon the ideal splendours of Christianity—were smitten with the phaze of beauty, of sublimity, of infinitude, of intellectual elevation—were charmed with its supposed doctrine of abstraction from mundane agitations, and found within the sphere of its revelations, unfathomable depths where vague meditation might plunge and plunge with endless descents. Fascinated, deluded, and still blinded more by the deepening shades of error, they forgot almost entirely the emotions of a true repentance, and of a cordial faith, and of a cheerful obedience; and in the rugged path of gratuitous afflictions, and unnatural mortifications, pursued a spectral resemblance of piety, unsubstantial and cold as the mists of night.

While hundreds were fatally infatuated by this enthusiastic religion, the piety of thousands was more or less impaired by their mere admiration of it; and very few altogether escaped the sickening infection which its presence spread through the Church.*

* A volume might soon be filled with proofs of this assertion, drawn exclusively from the writings of those of the Fathers who retained most of the vigour of native good sense, and held the nearest to the purity of Christian doctrine. The works of John Chrysostom

Modern writers of a certain class have expatiated with disproportionate amplification upon the open and flagrant corruptions which, as it is alleged, followed as a natural consequence from the secular aggrandizement of the clergy, when a voice from the heavens of political power said to the Church, "Come up hither." No doubt, an enhancement and expansion of pride, ambition, luxuriousness, and every mundane passion, took place at Rome, at Constantinople, at Alexandria, at Antioch, and elsewhere, when emperors, instead of oppressing, or barely tolerating the doctrine of Christ, bowed obsequiously to his

would afford abundant illustration of this sort.—Let his Epistle to the Monks be singled out.—It contains many really admirable instructions and exhortations on the subject of prayer; and, with much propriety, recommends the practice of ejaculatory supplication. Nevertheless, there is scarcely a passage quoted from the Scriptures in this piece that is not distorted from its obvious and simple meaning, in such manner as would best comport with the practices and notions of the ascetic life. If the meaning put by Chrysostom upon the texts he adduces be the true one, then must a large part of the inspired writings be deemed utterly useless to those who have not abjured the duties of common life. Or if such persons may still be permitted to enjoy their part in the Scriptures, not less than the monks, then must we suppose *a double sense* throughout the Bible. In fact the notion of a double sense flowed inevitably from the monkish institution, and wrought immense mischief in the Church.—This is an evil not wholly extinct.

The epistle just referred to, stands foremost in the Thesaurus Asceticus of the Jesuit Peter Possinus;—a collection affording abundant, and very curious illustration of the topics of this and the following section. Yet scarcely a passage could be adduced that is free from some such impiety as must forbid its appearance in a modern book.

ministers.* But the very same evils, far from being called into existence by the breath of im-

* There is no need to question the truth of the following anecdote, reported by Sulpitius, concerning St. Martin of Tours:—The Emperor Maximus, a man of a haughty temper, and elate by victories over his rivals, had received the unworthy adulation of a crowd of fawning Bishops; while Martin alone maintained the apostolic authority. For when suits were to be urged, he rather commanded than entreated the royal compliance, and refused many solicitations to take a place with others of his order at the imperial table, saying, that he would not eat bread with a man who had deprived one emperor of his throne, and another of life. But at length, when Maximus excused his assumption of the purple by pleading the force that had been put upon him by the legions, the use he had made of power, and the apparent sanction of heaven in the successes with which he had been favoured, and stated also that he had never destroyed an enemy except in open fight, Martin, overcome by reason or by entreaties, repaired to the royal banquet, to the very great joy of the Emperor. The tables were crowded by persons of quality, among them, the brother and uncle of Maximus; between these reclined one of Martin's presbyters; he himself occupied a seat near the Emperor. During supper, according to custom, the waiter presented a goblet of wine to the Emperor, who commanded it rather to be offered to so holy a Bishop, from whose hand he expected and desired to receive it again. But Martin, when he had drank of the cup, handed it to his presbyter, not deeming any one present more worthy to drink after himself; nor would he have thought it becoming to his character had he preferred even the Emperor, or those next to him in dignity, to his own presbyter. It is added, that Maximus and his officers took this contempt in exceeding good part!—*Sulp. Sev. de Vita Mart. cap.* xx.

The same writer reports a not less characteristic incident in honour of the holy Bishop, in his dialogue concerning the miraculous powers of St. Martin:—This personage, it seems, was in the habit of frequenting the palace, where he was always honourably entertained by the Empress, who not only hung upon his lips for instruction, but, in imitation of the penitent mentioned in the Gospels, actually bathed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair; and he who never before had sustained the touch of woman, could not avoid

perial favour, had reached a bold height even while the martyrs were still bleeding. And moreover, how offensive or injurious soever these scandals might be, either before or after the epoch of the political triumph of the cross, they did but scathe the exterior of Christianity. In every age the vices—always duly blazoned—of secular churchmen, have stained its surface. But

her assiduities. She, unmindful of the state and dignity and splendours of her royal rank, lay prostrate at the feet of Martin, whence she could not be removed until she had obtained permission, first from her husband, and then by his aid from the Bishop, to wait upon him at table as his servant, without the assistance of any menial. The blessed man could no longer resist her importunities; and the Empress herself made the requisite preparations of couch, and table, and cookery, (in temperate style) and water for the hands; and as he sat, stood aloof, and motionless, in the manner proper to a slave; with due modesty and humility, mixing and presenting the wine. And when the meal was ended, reverently collected the crumbs, which she deemed of higher worth than the delicacies of a royal banquet.—Cap. 6.

In how short a time may prodigious revolutions take place in the sentiments of men! This monkish Bishop was removed by not more than three or four lives from the Apostle John! and this humble Empress occupied the honours which, within the memory of the existing generation, had been sustained by the mother of Galerius! It should be added, that the auditor of the story above related, shocked at the inconsistency of St. Martin in thus admitting the offices of a woman so near his devoted person, requires from the narrator an explanation; who, in reply, reminds his friend, that the compliance of the Bishop with the solicitations of the Emperor and Empress was the price by which he obtained from the former release and grace for the persecuted Priscillianists. The best thing, by far, related of the Bishop of Tours, is his firmness in opposing persecution. There is great reason to believe that, in common with several of the most noted characters of Church history, his *true reputation* has been immensely injured by the ill-judged zeal of his biographer.

when there has been warmth and purity within, the mischief occasioned by such evils has scarcely been more than that of giving point to the railleries of men who would still have scoffed, though not a bishop had been arrogant, or a presbyter licentious.

Christianity lost its simplicity and glory in the hands of its most devoted friends long before the impure alliance between the Church and the world had taken place. The copious history of this internal perversion would afford a worthy subject of diligent inquiry; and though materials for a complete explication of the process of corruption are not in existence, enough remains to invite and reward the necessary labour.

The enthusiasm of the ancient Church presents itself under several distinct forms, among which the following may be mentioned as the most conspicuous:—The enthusiasm of Voluntary Martyrdom;—that of Miraculous Pretension;—that of Prophetical Interpretation, or Millenarianism;—that of the Mystical exposition of Scripture;—and that of Monachism. Of these, the last, whether or not it was truly the parent of the other kinds, includes them all as parts of itself; for whatever perversions of Christianity were chargeable upon the sentiments and practices of the general Church, the same belonged by eminence to the recluses. A review of the principles and the ingredients of this system will better accord with the limits and design of this Essay,

than an extended examination of facts under the separate heads just named.

A strict equity has by no means always been observed by Protestant writers in their criminations of the Romish Church. With the view of aggravating the just and necessary indignation of mankind against the mother of corruption, it has been usual to lay open the concealments of the monastery; and with materials before him so various and so copious, even the dullest writer might cheaply be entertaining, eloquent, and vigorous. Meantime it is not duly considered, or not fairly stated, that the reprobation passes back, in full force, to an age much more remote than that of the supremacy of Rome. The bishops of Rome did but avail themselves of the aid of a system which had reached a full maturity without their fostering care—which had been sanctioned and cherished, almost without an exception, by every father of the Church, eastern and western—which had come down in its elements even from the primitive age, and which had won for itself a sufferage so general, if not universal, that he must have possessed an extraordinary measure of wisdom, courage, and influence, who should have ventured beyond a cautious and moderated censure of its more obvious abuses.*

* The Christians of Neocæsarea are reproved by Basil for admitting too easily the slanders propagated by Satan, the Father of lies, against certain women of the monastic order, whose improprieties, ακοσμια,

Every essential principle, almost every adjunct, and almost every vice of the monkery of the tenth or twelfth century, may be detected in that of the fifth: or if an earlier period were named, proof would not be wanting to make the allegation defensible.* But if it be affirmed that the actual amount of hypocrisy and corruption usually sheltered beneath the roof of the monastery, was incomparably greater in the later than in the earlier age, it should, as a counterpoise be stated, that in the later period the religious houses contained almost all the piety and learning that any where existed; while in the former there was certainly as much piety without as within these seclusions—and much more of learning.† The monkery of the middle ages, moreover, stands partially excused by the dense ignorance of the times; while that

if real, he does not wish to defend. It is evident that these converts of the good Gregory, though they wisely disliked the monkish system, scarcely ventured to do more than find fault with its glaring abuses. The same sort of measured and reserved reprehension may be found not seldom in those of the fathers who were the least inclined to the prevailing enthusiasm.

* The life of St. Anthony, by the pious and respectable Athanasius, would alone afford ample proof of the assertion, that even in the third century the spirit of fanaticism, and the practices of religious knavery, had reached a height scarcely surpassed at any later period.

† The first Christian monks followed the Essenes in this particular also, that they despised human science; and it was not until learning had been driven from among secular persons, that it took refuge in monasteries. If the monks had avoided the infection of the philosophy, "falsely so called," which the Platonists brought into the Church, and instead, had given their leisure to the toils of biblical learning, they would not so soon and so completely have spoiled Christianity.

of the ancient Church is condemned by the surrounding light, both of human and divine knowledge. The very establishments which redeem the age of Roger Bacon from oblivion and contempt, do but blot the times of Gregory Nazianzen.

Eusebius,* followed by several later writers, asserts—though in opposition to the most explicit evidence, and manifestly for the purpose of giving sanction to a system so much admired in his time, that the Christian sodalities were directly derived from those of the Essenes and Therapeutics of Judea and Egypt, whom he affirms to have been Christian recluses of the first century, indebted for their rules and establishment to St. Mark. The testimony of the Jew Philo† gives conclusive contradiction to this sinister averment; not to mention that of Pliny, and Josephus; for the minute description given by that writer of the opinions and observances of the sect, besides that it is incompatible with the supposition that the people spoken of were Christians, was composed in the life-time of Paul and Peter, and the recluses are then mentioned as having long existed under the same regulations. Nevertheless the coincidence between the sentiments and practices of the Jewish and of the

* *Hist. Ecclesiast.* lib. ii. cap. 16. See also *Evan. Praep.* lib. viii. cap. 11. The Romanists generally adopt this misrepresentation of Eusebius.

† The passages from Philo, Josephus, and Pliny, are given at length by Prideaux, *Connect.* Part II. Book V.

Christian monks, is far too complete and exact to be attributed either to accident, or merely to the influence of general principles, operating alike in both instances; and the more limited assertion of Photius* may safely be adopted, who affirms that "the sect of Jews who followed a philosophic life, whether contemplative or active—the one called Essenes, the other Therapeutics—not only founded monasteries and private sanctuaries, σεμνεια, but laid down the rules which have been adopted by those who, in our own times, lead a solitary life."

A reference to the previous existence of monasticism among the Jews, in a very specious, and, in some respects, commendable mode, is indispensable to the forming of an equitable judgment of the conduct of those Christians in Palestine and Egypt, who first abandoned the duties of common life for the indulgence of their religious tastes.† They did but adopt a system

* Bibliothec. Art. CIII. Philo. The annotator upon this article quotes Philo in illustration of the meaning of the word σεμνειον, which seems to have been the designation of the little chapel or *oratory* so frequently constructed in secluded situations by the devout Jews, for the exercises of piety; and to which allusion is supposed to be made in the Gospels. See *Bennet's Christian Oratory*, and *Campbell's Dissertations*. Into these little sanctuaries no article of food, or accommodation for the body, was ever brought; they differed therefore from the cells of the hermits.

† On the common and acknowledged principles of historical composition, the practice which has so much prevailed of commencing Church history with the ministry of Christ, must be deemed unsatisfactory and improper. If the rise and progress of Christianity is to

which was already sanctioned by long usage, which, though existing in the time of Christ and the Apostles, had not drawn upon itself from Him or them any *explicit* condemnation;* and which might even plead a semblance of support from some of their injunctions, literally understood, though plainly condemned by the spirit of Christianity.

Nor is this the sole circumstance that should, in mere justice, be considered in connexion with the rise of Christian monachism; for before the mere facts can be understood, and certainly before the due measure of blame can be assigned to the parties concerned, it is indispensable that we divest ourselves of the prejudices, physical, moral, and intellectual, which belong to our austere climate, high-toned irritability, edacious appetites, and pampered constitutions;—to our rigid style of thinking, and to our commercial habits of feeling. The Christian of England in

be understood as *matter of history*, the state of the Jews and surrounding nations in the preceding century should be fully depicted.

* Different suppositions have been adopted for explaining the remarkable fact that no mention of the Essenes occurs in the New Testament, though the other Jewish sects are so often and so explicitly named: the reasons given and adduced by Lardner, *Cred.* Part I. chap. 4, are satisfactory. It has been well observed that though our Lord does not explicitly name, or refute the Essenes, every one of their distinguishing principles is condemned in his arguments with the Pharisees. So far as these recluses were worthy of blame, they came virtually under the censures pronounced upon the practices and doctrine of those, who while they exaggerated the adjuncts of piety, forgot its substance.

the nineteenth century, and the Christian of Syria in the second, stand almost at the extremest points of opposition in all the non-essentials of human nature; and the former must possess great pliability of imagination, and much of the philosophic temper, as well as the spirit of Christian charity, fairly and fully to appreciate the motives and conduct of the latter.

That quiescent under-action of the mind to which we apply the term meditation, is a habit of thought that has been engrafted upon the European intellect in consequence of the reception of Christianity. It is a product almost as proper to Asia as are the aromatics of Arabia, or the spices of India. The human mind does not every where expand in this manner, nor spontaneously show these hues of heaven, nor emit this fragrance, except under the fervent suns and deep azure skies of tropical regions.* If the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures had been confined to the East, as in fact they have been

* Persia and India were the native soils of the contemplative philosophy, as Greece was the source of the ratiocinative. The immense difference between the Asiatic and the European turn of mind—if the familiar phrase may be used, becomes conspicuous if some pages of either the Logic or Ethics of Aristotle are compared with what remains of the sentiments of the Gnostics. The influence of Christianity upon the moderns has been to temper the severity of the ratiocinative taste, with a taste for contemplation;—contemplation by so much the better than that of the oriental sages, as it takes its range in the heart, not in the imagination.

almost confined to the West, the modern nations of Europe would perhaps have known as little of the compass of the meditative faculty, and of its delights, as did the Romans in the age of Sylla. The Greeks, being near to Asia geographically, near by similarity of climate, and near by the repeated importations of eastern philosophy, imbibed something of the spirit of tranquil abstraction: yet was it foreign to the genius of that restless and reasoning people. Pythagoras probably, and certainly Plato, whose mind was almost as much Asiatic as Grecian, and whose writings are anomalies in Grecian literature, effected a partial amalgamation of the oriental with the western style of thought. Yet the foreign mixture would probably have disappeared if Christianity had not afterwards diffused eastern sentiments through the west. The combination was again cemented by the writings of those fathers who, after having studied Plato, and taught the rhetoric and philosophy of Greece, devoted their talents to the service of the Gospel.*

But though the nations of the west have acquired a taste for this species of thought, it is the distinction of the Asiatic to meditate; as to reason, and to act, is the glory of the European. To withdraw the soul from the senses—to divorce

* Justyn Martyr should be named at the head of this class, which includes Ireneus, Tertullian, Pantænus, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Origen, not to mention names of a later period.

the exterior from the inner man—to detain the spirit within its own circle, and to accustom it there to find its bliss—to penetrate the depths and concealments of the heart—to repose during lengthened periods upon a single idea, without a wish for progression or change:—or to break away from the imperfections of the visible world—to climb the infinite—to hold converse with supernal beauty and excellence; these are the prerogatives and pleasures of the intellectualist of Asia: and this is a happiness which he enjoys in a perfection altogether unknown to the busy, nervous, and frigid people of the north. If by favour of a peculiar temperament the oriental frees himself from the solicitations of voluptuous indulgence; if the mental tastes are vivid enough to counteract the appetites; then he finds a life of inert abstraction, of abstemiousness, and of solitude, not merely easy, but delicious.

The lassitude which belongs to his constitution and climate more than suffices to reconcile the contemplatist to the want of those enjoyments which are to be obtained only by toil. A genial temperature, and a languid stomach, reduce the necessary charges of maintenance to an amount that must seem incredibly small to the well-housed, well-clothed, and high-fed people of northern Europe. The slenderest revenues are, therefore, enough to free him from all cares of the present life. He has only to renounce married life—its claims and its burdens, and then the

skeleton-machinery of his individual existence may be impelled in its daily round of sluggish movement, by air, and water, and a lettuce.*

The Asiatic character is in no inconsiderable degree affected by the habits which result from the insufferable fervour of the sun at noon, and which compels a suspension of active employments during the broad light of day. The period of venial indolence easily extends itself through all the hours of sultry heat, if necessity does not exact labour. And then the quiescence in which the day has been passed lends an elasticity of mind to the hours of night, when the effulgent magnificence of the heavens kindles the imagination, and enhances meditation to ecstacy. How little, beneath the lowering, and chilly, and misty

* Sulpitius affords abundant illustration of the topics adverted to in this section. Perhaps, within so small a compass, the principles and practices of the ancient monachism are no where else so fully brought into view, as in his Dialogues and Epistles. He may properly be quoted in the present instance. Postumianus, lately returned from the East, that is to say, from Egypt, Arabia, and Palestine, describes to his astonished brethren of a monastery in Gaul, the abstemiousness of the oriental monks, as well as their piety and marvellous exploits. (On his outward voyage Postumianus had gone ashore at Carthage to visit the spots dedicated to the saints, especially—ad sepulcrum Cypriani Martyris *adorare*.) His first specimen of a monkish dinner, in the oriental style, was the being invited to partake, with *four* others, of half a barley cake; to which was added a handful of a certain sweet herb, altogether deemed to be —prandium locupletissimum. Sulpitius hence takes occasion to joke a brother, who was present, upon their own comparative appetites; but he replies that it was extremely unkind to urge upon *Gauls* a manner of living proper only to angels.—Hearty eating, says he, in a Greek, is gluttony; but in a Gaul—nature.

skies of Britain, can we appreciate the power of these natural excitements of mental abstraction!

In an enumeration of the natural causes of the anchoretic life, the influence of scenery should by no means be overlooked. As the gay and multiform beauties of a broken surface, teeming with vegetation (when seconded by favouring circumstances) generate the soul of poetry; so (with similar aids) the habit of musing in pensive vacuity of thought is cherished by the aspect of boundless wastes, and arid plains, or of enormous piles of naked mountain: and to the spirit that has turned with sickening or melancholy aversion from the haunts of man, such scenes are not less grateful or less fascinating than are the most delicious landscapes to the frolic eye of joyous youth. The wilderness of the Jordan, the stony tracts of Arabia, the precincts of Sinai, and the dead solitudes of sand, traversed—but not enlivened by the Nile, offered themselves, therefore, as the natural birth-places of monachism; and skirting as they did, the focus of religion, long continued (indeed they have never wholly ceased) to invite numerous desertions from the ranks of common life.

A general and extreme corruption of manners—the wantonness, and folly, and enormity of licentious opulence, and the foul depravity which

never fails to characterize the misery that follows the steps of luxury, operate powerfully in the way of reaction to exacerbate the motives, and to swell the excesses of the ascetic life, when once that mode of religion has been called into being. If the "powers of the world to come" are vividly felt by those who renounce sensual pleasure, the vigour of their self-denial, and the firmness of their resolution in adhering to their rule, will commonly bear proportion to the depth of the surrounding profligacy. Nothing could more effectually starve this species of enthusiasm in any country in which it appeared to be growing, than to elevate public morals. The exaggerated virtue of the monastery can never subsist in the near neighbourhood of the genuine virtue of domestic life; nor will religious celibacy be in high esteem among a people who regard adultery, not less than murder and theft, as a crime, and with whom fornication is the cloaked vice only of a few. But in Syria and the neighbouring countries, at the time when the monastic life took its rise, the most shameless dissoluteness of manners prevailed, and prevailed to a degree that has rarely been exceeded; and there is reason to believe that the early establishments of the Essenes were, in a great measure, peopled by those who, having imbibed the love of virtue from Moses and the prophets, fled, almost by necessity, from a world in which the practice of temperance and purity had become scarcely

possible.* In after times, the corruption of the great cities, in a similar manner, contributed to fill the monastic houses.

A large indulgence, to say no more, is therefore due to those ardent but feeble-minded persons, who, untaught by an experiment of the danger they incurred, fell into the plausible error of supposing that a just solicitude for the preservation of personal virtue might excuse their withdrawment from the duties of common life; especially as they were willing to purchase a discharge from its claims, by resigning their share of its lawful delights. The Christian recluses fled from scenes in which, as they believed, purity could not breathe, to solitudes where (though no doubt they found themselves mistaken) they supposed it would flourish spontaneously. And, in truth, though it must be much more difficult to live virtuously under the provoking restraints of monastic vows, than amid the allowed enjoyments of domestic life—refined by Christianity, there may be room to question

* The evidence of Josephus, (often cited) though there may sometimes be traced in it a little oratorical exaggeration, is sufficient to prove the existence of a more than ordinary profligacy and ferocity among the Jews of his time. This people, destitute of the restraining and refining influence of philosophy and of elegant literature, which ameliorated the manners of the surrounding nations, had been deprived, almost entirely, of all salutary restraints from the Divine Law by the corrupt evasions of Rabbinical exposition. At the same time, the keen disappointment of the national hope of universal dominion under the Messiah, exasperated their native pride to madness.

whether the balance might not be really in favour of the monastery, when the only alternative was an abode with extreme profligacy.

So natural to young and ardent minds, under the first fervours of religious feeling, is the wish to run far from the sight and hearing of seductive pleasure, and so plausibly may such a design recommend itself to the simple and sincere, that, even in our own times, if by any means the general opinion of the Christian Church could be brought round to favour, or to allow the practice of monastic seclusion—if, instead of being on all sides reprobated and ridiculed, it were permitted, encouraged and admired—the conjecture may be hazarded, that an instantaneous rush from all our religious communities would take place, and a host of the ardent, the imaginative, the melancholic—not to mention the disappointed, the splenetic, and the fanatical—would abandon the domestic circle and the scenes of business, to people sanctuaries of celibacy and prayer in every sequestered valley of our island.

Besides the ordinary miseries of frequent war and of a foreign domination, which afflicted, more or less, the other provinces of the Roman empire, the existence among the Jews of a species of fanaticism perfectly unparalleled, allowed the Syrian Palestine to taste very imperfectly the benefits of temperate and vigorous rule. The

intractable and malignant infatuation of that people so baffled the wisdom of the Roman government, and so disturbed its wonted equanimity, as to compel it to treat the unhappy Judea with unmeasured severity. Or if respite were enjoyed from military inflictions, the brutal violences of their own princes, or the atrocities perpetrated by demagogues, kept constantly alive the brand of public and private discord. During such times of insecurity and wretchedness, it is usual for the passive portion of the community to sink into a state, either of reckless sensuality or of pining despondency. But if, in this class, there are those who have received the consoling hope of a bright and peaceful immortality, it is only natural that, when hunted from all earthly comfort by violence and extortion, they should look wistfully at the grave, and long to rest where "the wicked cease from troubling." In this state of mind it cannot be deemed strange that, upon the first smile of opportunity, they should hasten away from scenes of blood and wrong, and anticipate the wished-for release from life, by hiding themselves in caverns and in deserts.

A frightful solitude might well appear a paradise, and extreme privations be thought luxurious, to those who, in their retreat, felt at length safe from an encounter with man—who, when savage, is by far the most terrible of all savage animals. Such were the causes which had driven

multitudes of the well-disposed among the Jews into the wilderness. The severities of persecution afterwards produced the same effect on the Christians; and first on those of Syria and Egypt.*

So long as he could wander unmolested over the pathless mountain tract, or exist in the arid desert, the timid follower of Christ not only avoided torture or violent death, but escaped what he dreaded more—the hazard of apostasy under extreme trial. Having once effected his retreat, and borne for a time the loss of friends and comforts, he soon acquired physical habits and intellectual tastes which rendered a life in the wilderness not only tolerable, but agreeable. To the fearful and inert, safety and rest are the prime ingredients of happiness, and go far towards constituting a heaven upon earth.

In the absolute solitude of the desert, or in the mitigated seclusion of the monastery, a large proportion, probably, of the recluses soon drooped into the inanity of trivial pietism; a few, perhaps, after the first excitement failed, bit their chain, from day to day, to the end of life; or wrung a wretched solace from concealed vices. But those who by vigour of mind supported better the

* This effect is well known to have resulted from the Decian persecution, and probably also from those that preceded it. No blame can be attributed to Christians, who, in such times, fled from cities, and took refuge in solitudes, unless, indeed, by so doing they abandoned those whom they ought to have defended.

preying of the soul upon itself, could do no otherwise than exchange the simple and affectionate piety, with which perhaps they entered the wilderness, for some form of visionary religion.* To maintain, unbent and unsullied, the rectitude of sound reason, and the propriety of sound feelings, in solitude, is an achievement which, it may confidently be affirmed, surpasses the powers of human nature. Good sense—never the product of a single mind—is the fruit of intercourse and collision.

When the several circumstances above mentioned are duly considered, they will remove from candid minds almost every sensation of asperity or contemptuous reprobation towards those who, in their day of defective knowledge, became the victims, or even the zealous supporters, of the prevalent enthusiasm. We have done then with the parties in these scenes of delusion and folly;—at least with those of them who were sincere in their error. But when we turn to the system itself, and gain that license which charity herself may grant, while an abstraction only is under contemplation, we may remember that this monkery, so innocent in its

* The errors and extravagances generated by the monastic life did not ordinarily extend to the fundamental principles of Christianity. The monks were, for the most part, zealously attached to the doctrine of the Nicene Creed, and the Church owes to many of them its thanks for the constancy with which they suffered in its defence.

commencement, and so plausible in its progress, was the chief means of destroying the substance of Christianity, and ought to be deemed the principal cause of the gross darkness which hung over the Church during more than a thousand years.

SECTION IX.

THE SAME SUBJECT.—INGREDIENTS OF THE ANCIENT MONACHISM.

Among the principal elements of the ancient Monachism, it is natural to name, first—

Its contempt of the divine constitution of human nature, and its outrage of common instincts.

It may be hard to determine which is the greater folly and impiety—that of the Atheist, who can contemplate the admirable mechanism of the body, and not see there the proofs of divine wisdom and benevolence; or that of the enthusiast, who, seeing and acknowledging the hand of God in the mechanism of the human frame, yet dares to institute and to recommend modes of life which do violence to the manifest intentions of the Creator, as therein displayed; and moreover, is not afraid to assert a warrant from Heaven for such outrages. As if the Creator and Governor of the world were not one and the same Being—one in counsel and purpose. Or as if the Author of Christianity were at

variance with the Author of nature!* Yet this preposterous error, this virtual Manichæism, has

* The dictates of good sense are often curiously intermingled in the writings of the Fathers with the defence of the absurd system they espoused. (The incongruous mixture, has it not been of frequent occurrence in every age!) Cyril of Jerusalem, in the fourth of his Catechetical Discourses, and in the section περι σωματος, with great vigour and propriety urges the consideration referred to above, in reprehending those, in his time, who affected to despise and mal-treat the body.—"Is not the body," says he, "the excellent workmanship of God?" and he reminds the ascetic that it is the soul, not the body, that sins. He goes on, in a lively manner, to hold forth the mean of wisdom, between opposite extremes; and while he much commends the monkish celibacy, nevertheless bestows upon matrimony its due praise.

"Et de continentia sermonem in primis audiant, ii qui vitam degunt solitariam, et virginum coetus, qui *vitam* in mundo *angelicam* instituunt. Magna vobis fratres corona reposita est, ne voluptate parva magnam dignitatem commutetis. Audite quid ait Apostolus—Ne quis scortator, aut impurus sit, ut Esau, qui uno edulio primatus suos vendidit. In evangelicis libris posthac describeris, quia tibi continentiam proposuisti, vide ne vicissim delearis, propter stuprum commissum. Neque vero si continentiam instituas ac præstes, ita sis superbia elatus, ut nuptiis allegatos insecteris. Honorabile est enim connubium, et thorus immaculatus, ut ait Apostolus. Et qui caste vivis, nonne natus es e conjugatis? Neque enim si possideas aurum, reprobes argentum." All this is very well, if we except the abuse of certain terms. But this abuse is in fact of the most dangerous tendency.—The Fathers by appropriating the words—*continence, chastity, temperance, virtue*, to the monastic mode of life, robbed the Christian community of that standard of morals which belongs to all. Our Lord and his Apostles enjoined purity and continence, and temperance, and heavenly mindedness, upon Christians universally, married and unmarried;—engaged or not engaged, in the affairs of common life. But the monks [illegible] to talk of purity and celibacy as if separable. What part then could the married claim in the practical portions of Scripture? These holy precepts were the property of the—*Elect of Christ*—that is, of the monks. Such are the consequences of extravagance in religion!

seemed to belong naturally to every attempt to stretch and exaggerate the precepts of the Gospel beyond their obvious sense; and indeed has seldom failed to show itself in seasons of unusual religious excitement.

Christianity is a religion neither for angels nor for ghosts; but for man, as God made him. Nevertheless, in revealing an endless existence, and in establishing the paramount claims of the future world, it placed all the interests of the present transient life under a comparison of immense disparity; so that it became true—true to a demonstration, that a man ought to "hate his own life" if the love of it put his welfare for immortality in jeopardy. Unquestionably, if by such means the well-being of the imperishable spirit could be secured and promoted, it would highly become a wise man to pass the residue of life—though it should hold out half a century, upon the summit of a column, exposed, like a bronze, to the changes of day and night, of summer and winter;* or to stand speechless and fixed with the arms extended until the joints

* The story of Symeon Stylites, told by Theodoret, has been often repeated. The well-attested exploits of the fakirs of India render this and many similar accounts related by the same writer, by Gregory Nyssen, Sozomen, &c. perfectly credible in all but a few of the particulars; and in these it is evident that the writers above named were imposed upon. The fasts professed to have been undergone by Symeon, by Anthony, and by others of the same class, most certainly surpass the powers of human nature, and must be held either to convict these monks and their accomplices of fraud, or their biographers of falsehood.

should stiffen, and the tongue forget its office; or to inhabit a tomb, or to hang suspended in the air by a hook in the side—these, and if there be any other practices still more horrifying to humanity, were doubtless wise, if, in the use of them, the soul might be advantaged; for the soul is of infinitely greater value than the body.

And much more might it be deemed lawful and commendable to refrain from matrimony—to withdraw from human society—to be clad in sackcloth—to inhabit a cavern, if such comparatively moderate abstinences and mortifications were found to promote virtue, and so to insure an enhancement of the bliss that never ends. Conduct of this sort, however painful it may be, is perfectly in harmony with the principle universally admitted to be reasonable, and in fact very commonly reduced to practice, namely, to endure a smaller immediate loss or inconvenience, for the sake of securing a greater future good.

The dictates of self-interest every day prompt sacrifices of this kind; and the maxims of natural virtue go much further, and often require a man to make the greatest deposit possible, even when the future advantage is doubtful, and when the sufferer is not the party who is to reap the expected benefit. On this principle the soldier places himself at the cannon's mouth, because the safety or future welfare of his country can be purchased at no other price. On this principle a pious son denies the wishes of his heart, and

remains unmarried, that he may sustain a helpless parent. Christianity is not therefore at all peculiar in asserting the claims of higher, over lower reasons of conduct in particular circumstances: or in demanding that, on special occasions, the enjoyments of life, and life itself, should be held cheap, or abandoned.

Our Lord and his ministers explicitly enjoined such sacrifices, whenever the interests of the present and of the future life came in competition: And themselves set the example of the self-denial which they recommended. Nothing can be more clear than the rule of bodily sacrifice maintained and exemplified in the New Testament;* and this rule is in perfect accordance with the dictates of common sense, and with the common practice of mankind.—Fasting, celibacy, martyrdom, and such like contrarieties to the "will of the flesh," stand all on the same ground in the system of Christian morals; they are ills which a wise and pious man will cheerfully endure whenever he is so placed that they cannot be avoided without damage or hazard to the soul. But when no such alternative is presented, then the voluntary

* Matt. v. 29, and xviii. 8. The same principle, in its application to the conduct of Christians towards others, is explained and illustrated by St. Paul with the utmost perspicuity, and in a style directly at variance with that of the Monkish writers. *See* Rom. xiv. throughout, and 1 Cor. vii., and viii. 13. To relinquish the less for the greater —to prefer the soul to the body—the future to the present, is the substance of all these apostolic precepts.

infliction becomes, as well in religious as in secular affairs, a folly, an impiety, and often a crime. To die without necessity, or to afflict oneself without reason, it not only an absurdity, but a sin.

And how immensely is this folly and immorality aggravated when it is found that the voluntary suffering, instead of being simply useless, becomes, in its consequences, highly pernicious; when, by abundant evidence, it is proved to generate the very worst corruptions and perversions to which human nature is liable! Such clearly are the inflictions of the monastic life—the solitude, the abstinence, the celibacy, the poverty!

The rule of Christian martyrdom is precise and unequivocal,* and is such as absolutely to exclude every sort of spontaneous heroism. The

* Math. x. 23. The First Epistle of Peter holds forth the principle and temper of Christian submission under persecution with a dignity, calmness, pathos, good sense, and perfect freedom from fanatical excitement; which, if no other document of our faith were extant, would fully carry the proof of the truth of Christianity. Let the genuineness of that Epistle be granted, (and it cannot be denied) and it will be impossible to reconcile it with any supposition but that of the reality of the facts to which it refers. It would be well if, in the argument with infidels, some single portion of the evidence—such, for example, as this Epistle—were adhered to pertinaciously until the proof it contains were satisfactorily disposed of. There is not a column of the Apostolic Epistles, that would not amply suffice for the refutation of all the tomes of ancient and modern scepticism;—were but the admitted principles of historical and critical evidence allowed to take their course in the argument between the Christian and the unbeliever.

motive also by which the Christian should be sustained is of a heart-affecting, not of an exciting kind; and the style of the Apostles, when alluding to this subject, is singularly sedate and reserved; nor is an idea introduced of a kind to inflame fanatical ambition. The reason of this caution is obvious; for to have kindled the enthusiasm of martyrdom would have been to nullify the demonstration intended to be given to the world of the truth of Christianity. So long as martyrdom rested on the primitive basis —and it rested there, with few exceptions,* until miraculous attestations had nearly ceased to be afforded—it yielded conclusive proof of the reality of the facts affirmed by the confessors. That is to say, so long as the Christians suffered

* Ignatius must be held to have set an example of unhappy consequence to the Church. His ardour for martyrdom, though unquestionably connected with genuine and exalted piety, was altogether unwarranted by apostolic precept or example, and stands in the strongest contrast imaginable with the manner of Paul, when placed in similar circumstances, whose calm, manly, and spirited defence of his life, liberty, and immunities, on every occasion, imparts the highest possible *argumentative value* to his suffering in the cause of Christianity. Let it be imagined that Ignatius had acquitted himself in the same spirit; had pleaded with Trajan for his life, on the grounds of universal justice, and Roman law; had established his innocence of any crime known to the law; and had then professed distinctly the reasons of his Christian profession, and at the same time calmly declared his determination to die rather than deny his convictions. How precious a document would have been the narrative of *such a* martyrdom! There can be no doubt that many such martyrdoms actually took place; but they were less to the taste of the church historians of the third and fourth centuries than those that were made conspicuous by an ostentation of eagerness to die.

only when suffering could be avoided *in no other way* than by denying their profession, and so long as they endured tortures, and met death, in a spirit not raised above a calm courage, or even displayed timidity or reluctance, such sufferings afforded direct demonstration of the sincerity of their belief; and they having been eye-witnesses of supernatural interpositions, and being often the very agents of miraculous power, their sincere belief, their honesty, carried with it the proof of the facts so attested.

But when, at a later time, martyrdom was courted in a spirit of false heroism, and came to be endured in a corresponding style of enthusiastic excitement, it lost almost the whole of its value as a proof of the truth of Christianity. For it is well known to be within the compass of human nature to endure unmoved and exultingly the most extreme torments in fanatical adherence to a religious tenet; and such sufferings evince nothing more than the firmness or the infatuation of the victim. On the contrary, when the confessor has fallen into the hands of persecuting power by no imprudence or temerity of his own—when he avails himself, with promptitude and calmness, of every legal and honourable means of self-defence or escape—when he pleads truth and right in arrest of judgment, and at last yields to the stroke because nothing could avert it but the forfeiture of conscience, then it is manifest that a deliberate conviction is the real

motive of his conduct; and then also, if he have a *primary knowledge* of the facts for affirming which he dies, his death, on the surest principles of evidence, must be accepted as containing incontestible proof of those facts.

The recluses were not the first to spoil the primitive practice of martyrdom; but their principles greatly cherished the abuse when once it had been introduced; and still more did their conduct and their writings enhance the pernicious superstitions which presently resulted from the foolish respect paid to the tombs and relics of confessors. These trivial and idolatrous reverences of human heroism can find no room of entrance until the great realities of Christianity have been forgotten; until the humbling and peace-giving doctrine of atonement has been lost sight of. The contrite heart, made glad by the assurance of pardon through the merit of Him, who alone has *merit supererogatory*, neither admits sentiments of vain glory for itself, nor is prone to yield excessive worship to the deeds of others.*

* It deserves particular notice that the martyrs of the Reformation in England, France, Spain, and Italy, with very few exceptions, suffered in a spirit incomparably more sedate, and more nearly allied to that displayed and recommended by the Apostles, than did the Christians, generally, of the third century. The reason of the difference is not obscure;—these modern confessors understood the capital doctrine of Christianity much more fully and clearly than did those of the age of Origen.

Celibacy, though it may seem to be a kind of self-devotion, less extreme than voluntary martyrdom, was in fact a much greater and a much worse outrage upon human nature. It is the fundamental article of the monkish system; and had evidently two distinct motives: the first, and probably the originating cause of this extraordinary practice was the impracticability of uniting the pleasures of seclusion and lazy meditation with the duties and burdens of domestic life. The alternative was unavoidable, either to renounce the happiness and the cares of husband and father, or the spiritual luxuries of supine contemplation. The one species of enjoyment offered itself precisely as the price that must be paid for obtaining the other.*

The second motive of monkish celibacy, and which so gained ascendancy over the first as to keep it almost wholly out of sight, sprung more immediately from the centre illusion of the system; and the real nature of that illusion stands forwards in this instance in a distinct and

* In the only places in the New Testament where celibacy is recommended, Matth. xix. 12, and 1 Cor. vii. 32, the reason is of this substantial and intelligible kind, namely, that in the case of *individuals*, placed in peculiar circumstances, a single life would be advantageous, inasmuch as it would give them better opportunity of serving the Lord without distraction. Precisely the same advice might sometimes with propriety be given to a soldier, or to a statesman: a high motive justifies a sacrifice of personal happiness. No where in the discourses of our Lord, or in the writings of the Apostles, is there to be discovered a trace of the monkish motive of celibacy—namely, the supposed sanctity of that state.

prehensible form. The very germ of that transmuted piety, which, in the end, banished true religion from the Church, may readily be brought under inspection by tracing the natural history of the sentiment that attributes sanctity to single life.

For reasons that are obvious and highly important, a sentiment of pudicity, which can never be thrown aside without reducing man to the level—nay, much below the level of the brutes, belongs to the primary link of the social system. But this feeling, necessary as it is to the purity and the dignity of social life, suggests, by a close and easy affinity of ideas, the supposition of guilt as belonging to indulgence, and then the correlative supposition of innocence, or of holiness, as belonging to continence. Nevertheless, feelings of this sort, when analysed, will be found to have their seat in the imagination exclusively, and only by accident to implicate the moral sense. They belong to that class of *natural illusions*, which, in the combination of the various and discordant ingredients of human nature, serve to amalgamate what would otherwise be utterly incompatible. Among all the natural illusions, or as they might be termed, the pseudo-moral sentiments, there is not one which so nearly resembles the genuine sense of right and wrong as this, or one that is so intimately blended with them.

It is then easy to perceive the process by

which infirm minds passed into the error of attributing sanctity to celibacy. But the law of Christian purity knows of no such confusion of ideas. The very same authority which forbids adultery, enjoins marriage: and so long as morality is understood to consist in obedience to the declared will of God, it can never be imagined that a man is defiled by living in matrimony, any more than by "eating with unwashen hands." But when once religion has passed into the imagination, and when the sentiments which have their seat in that faculty have become predominant, so as to crush or enfeeble those that belong to conscience, then is it inevitable that the true purity which consists in "keeping the commandments," should be supplanted by that artificial holiness which is a mere refinement upon natural instincts. Under the influence of false notions of this sort, nothing seems so saintly as for a man to shrink horrifically from the touch of woman; nothing scarcely so spiritually degrading as to be a husband and a father.* Impious

* "Grande est et immortale, pœne ultra naturam corpoream, superare luxuriam, et concupiscentiæ spasmeam adolescentiæ facibus accensam animi virtute restringuere, et spiritali conatu vim genuinæ oblectationis excludere, *viveréque contra humani generis legem*, despicere solatia conjugii, dulcedinem contemnere liberorum, quæcumque esse præsentis vitæ commoda possint, pro nihilo spe futurorum beatitudinis computare." The Epistle of Sulpitius, *de Virginitate*, in which this passage occurs, contains, it should be confessed, much more good sense and good morality, in the latter part of it, than one would expect to find in conjunction with absurdities such as that above quoted. The annotator on the passage well says, that "the Ascetics avoided

and mad enthusiasm;—and not only irreligious and absurd, but pestilent also; for this same monkish doctrine of the merit of virginity stands convicted, on abundant evidence, of having transplanted the worst vices of polytheistic Greece into the very sanctuaries of religion; and so, of infecting the nations of modern Europe with crimes which, had they not been kept alive in monasteries, Christianity would long ago have banished from the earth.

How little did the pious men, who, in the third century, extolled the merit of mortification, and petty torture, and celibacy, think of the hideous corruptions in which these practices were to terminate! A sagacity more than human was needed to foresee the end from the beginning. But with the experience of past ages before us, we may well learn to distrust all specious attempts to *exaggerate morality,* or *to attach ideas of blame to things innocent or indifferent.* This over-doing of virtue inevitably diverts the mind from what is substantially good, and is moreover the almost invariable symptom of a transmuted or fictitious pietism.

II. The ancient monkery was a system of the

the pleasures of domestic life, not because they were sweets, but because conjoined with great cares, which those escaped who lived in celibacy. Nor is it to be denied that married life is obnoxious to great and heavy inconveniences: nevertheless, if under those difficulties we live holily and religiously, our future recompense will surely not be less than as if, to be free from them, we had embraced a single life."

most deliberate selfishness. That solicitude for the preservation of individual interests, which forms the basis of the human constitution, is so broken up and counteracted by the claims and pleasures of domestic life, that though the principle remains, its manifestations are suppressed, and its predominance effectually prevented, except in some few tempers peculiarly unsocial. But the anchoret is a selfist by his very profession; and like the sensualist, though his taste is of another kind, he pursues his personal gratifications, reckless of the welfare of others. His own advantage or delight, or, to use his favourite phrase—the good of his soul, is the sovereign object of his cares. His meditations, even if they embrace the compass of heaven, come round, ever and again, to find their ultimate issue in his own bosom: but can that be true wisdom which just ends at the point whence it started? True wisdom is an emanative principle. In abjuring the use of the active faculties, in reducing himself, by the spell of vows, to a condition of physical and moral annihilation, he says to his fellows concerning whatever might otherwise have been converted to their benefit—"it is corban;" thus making void the law of love to our neighbour, by a pretended intensity of love to God.

That so monstrous an immorality should have dared to call itself by the name of sanctity, and should do so too in front of Christianity, is indeed amazing, and could never have happened if

Christianity had not first been shorn of its life-giving warmth, as the sun is deprived of its power of heat when we ascend into the rarity of upper space. The tendency of a taste for imaginative indulgences to petrify the heart has been already adverted to; and it receives a signal illustration in the monkish life, especially in its more perfect form of absolute separation from the society of man. The anchoret was a disjoined particle, frozen deep into the mass of his own selfishness, and there imbedded below the touch of every human sympathy. This sort of meditative insulation is the ultimate and natural issue of all enthusiastic piety; and may be met with even in our own times among those who have no inclination to run away from the comforts of common life.

III. Spiritual pride, the most repulsive of the religious vices, was both a main cause and a principal effect of the ancient monachism.

The particular manner in which this odious pride sprung up in the monastery deserves especial attention. That sort of plain and practical religion which adapts itself to the circumstances of common life — the religion taught by the Apostles — a religion of love, sobriety, temperance, justice, fit for the use of master and servant, of husband and wife, of parent and child, by no means satisfied the wishes of those who sought in Christianity a delicious dream of

unearthly excitements. It was therefore indispensable to imagine a new style of religion; and hence arose the doctrine, so warmly and incessantly advanced by the early favourers of monkery—that our Lord and his Apostles taught a two-fold piety, and recognized an upper and an under class in the church, and sanctioned the division of the Christian body into what might be termed a Plebeian, and a Patrician order.*

In accordance with this arrogant pretension it was believed, that while the Christian commonalty might be left to wallow in the affairs of common life—in business, matrimony, and such like impurities — the elect of Christ stood on a platform, high-lifted above the grossness of secular engagements and earthly passions, and were, in their Lord's esteem, immensely more holy, and higher in rank, as candidates for the honours of the future life, than the mass of the

* This doctrine appears more or less distinctly in every one of the fathers who at all favours the monastic life. It may seem to bear analogy to the principle of the Grecian philosophers who had their common maxims for the vulgar, and their hidden instructions for the few. But the resemblance is more apparent than real: the distinction arose among the Christians from altogether another source. The Church, that is to say the collective body of true believers, is called in the New Testament the spouse of Christ; but the monks perverted the figure by using it distinctively — by calling individual Christians "the brides of Christ," and by appropriating the honour to those who had taken the vow of celibacy. The most absurd and impious abuses of language presently followed from this error, and such as it were even blasphemous to repeat. Jerom, Basil, Ambrose, are evidently charmed with these irreligious conceits.

faithful. When this supposition became generally adopted and assented to, out of the monastery as well as within it, the first and natural consequence was a great depreciation of the standard of morals among the people. If there were admitted to be two rates or degrees of virtue, there were, of course, two laws or rules of life: whatever therefore in the Scriptures seemed to be strict, or pure, or elevated, was assigned to the upper code; while the lower took to itself only what wore an aspect of laxity and indulgence. Even an attempt on the part of secular Christians to make advances in holiness might be condemned as a species of presumption, or as an invasion of the proprieties of the saintly order. Heavenly mindedness and purity of heart were chartered to the regulars—the monopolists of perfect grace. Alas! that the privileged should have availed themselves so moderately of their rights!

A second, and not less natural consequence of the same principle, was the formation among the monks, either of an insufferable arrogance and self-complacency; or of a villanous hypocrisy—an hypocrisy which qualified those who sustained it to become the agents of every detestable knavery that might promote the ambitious machinations, or screen the debaucheries of the order.

If a reputation for superior sanctity be ever safe and serviceable to a Christian, it must be

when his conduct and temper, even to the inmost privacies of domestic life, are open to indifferent observers; — not to the cringing servitors of a religious establishment, or to the holy man's hangers-on, and accomplices, but to the children and the servants of a family:—the moral vision of a child is especially quick and clear. He who thus lives under the eye of witnesses not to be deceived, and not to be bribed, may actually demean himself the better for being reputed eminently good. Not so the man who inhabits a den or a cell — who is seen by the world only through a loop-hole; or who shows himself to an admiring crowd when, and where, and in what manner he pleases. To such a one, the praise of sanctity will most often be found inscribed on its other side with a licence to crime. Under circumstances so blasting to the simple honesty and unaffected humility of true piety, almost the best that charity can imagine is, that the hooded saint deludes himself more than he deceives others.

Such are the natural and almost invariable consequences—in monasteries, or out of them—of all ambitious attempts to render religion a something too elevated and too pure to be brought in contact with the affairs of common life. The endeavour generates a pretension that can never be filled out by truth and reality: the deficiency must be made up by delusion and deception, the one begetting arrogance, the other knavery.

IV. Greediness of the supernatural formed an essential characteristic of the ancient monachism.

The cares and toils and necessities, the refreshments and delights of common life, are the great teachers of common sense; nor can there be any effective school of sober reason where these are excluded. Whoever, either by elevation of rank, or peculiarity of habits, lives far removed from this kind of tuition, rarely makes much proficiency in that excellent quality of the intellect. A man who has little or nothing to do with other men on terms of open and free equality, needs the native sense of five, to behave himself only with a fair average of propriety. Absolute solitude (and seclusion in its degree) necessitates a lapse into some species of absurdity more or less nearly allied to insanity, and religious solitude naturally strays into the regions of vision and miracle.*

* "Habitant plerique in eremo sine ullis tabernaculis quos Anachoretas vocant. Vivunt herbarum radicibus: nullo unquam certo loco consistunt, ne ab hominibus frequententur: quas nox coëgerit sedes habent.....Inter hujus (Sina) recessus Anachoreta esse aliquis ferebatur quem diu multumque quæsitum videre non potui, qui ferè jam ante quinquaginta annos à conversatione humanâ remotus, nullo vestis usu, setis corporis sui tectus, nuditatem suam divino munere vestiebat. Hic quoties eum religiosi viri adire voluerunt, cursu avia petens, congressus vitabat humanos. Uni tantummodo ferebatur se ante quinquennium præbuisse, qui credo potenti fide id obtinere promeruit: cui inter multa conloquia percunctanti, cur homines tantopere vitaret, respondisse perhibetur, Eum qui ab hominibus frequentaretur non posse ab angelis frequentari."—*Sulp. Sev. Dialog.* I.

The monastery was at once the place where the illusions of distempered brains were the most likely to abound, and where the frauds which naturally follow in the train of such illusions were the most conveniently hatched and executed. Those dungeons of dimness, of silence, of absolute obedience; those scenes of nocturnal ceremony; those labyrinths of subterrene communication; those nurseries of craft and credulity, seemed as if constructed for the very purpose of fabricating miracles: and, in fact, if all the narratives of supernatural occurrences that are found upon the pages of the ancient church-writers were numbered, incomparably the larger proportion would appear to have been immediately connected with the religious houses. The wonder which goes to swell the vaunted achievements of the sainted abbot or brother, was effected—in the cell—in the chapel or church—in the convent-garden—in the depths of the overhanging forest, or upon the solitude of the neighbouring shore. Of all such miracles it is enough to say that, whether genuine or not, they can claim no respect from posterity, seeing that they stand not within the circle of credible testimony. History—lover of simplicity, scorns to place them on her page in any other form than as evidences of the credulity, if not of the dishonesty of the times!*

* Many laborious and voluminous discussions might have been saved, if the simple and very reasonable rule had been adopted of

The miraculous powers existing in the Church after the apostolic age, rest under a cloud that is not now to be thoroughly dispelled. But with safety the following propositions may be affirmed; — first, That the Christian doctrine received *some* miraculous attestations after the death of the Apostles;—secondly, That so early as the close of the fourth century, fraudulent or deceptive pretensions to miraculous power were very frequently advanced; — and, lastly, That at that period, and subsequently, there are instances, not a few, of a certain sort of sincerity and fervour in religion, conjoined with the very exceptionable attempts to acquire a Thaumaturgal reputation.* These deplorable cases deserve

waving investigation into the credibility of any narrative of supernatural or pretended supernatural events, said to have taken place *upon consecrated ground, or under sacred roofs.* Fanes, caves, groves, churches, convents, cells, are places in which the lover of history will make but a transient stay: he may easily find better employment than in sifting the evidence on which rest such stories as that of the roof-descended oil, used at the baptism of Clovis; or that of the relics discovered by Ambrose for the confutation of royal error (*Aug. Conf.* lib. ix. cap. 7); and a thousand others of like nature. Those who read church history cursorily, and are perhaps perplexed by the frequency of suspicious miracle, are not aware, generally, how very large a proportion of all such annoying relations may be readily and reasonably disposed of by adhering to the rule above stated. Another rule, presently to be mentioned, and not less well founded, discharges again a large portion of all that remains after application of the first.

* Gregory of Neocæsarea, commonly called Thaumaturgus, ought not to be involved in an accusation of this kind, for two reasons; first, because the *incidental* evidence which attests his having in truth possessed miraculous powers is strong; and, secondly, because the only

particular attention, especially as they show what are the natural fruits of fictitious pietism.—

If we choose to read the Church history of the fourth and fifth centuries in the spirit of frigid and purblind scepticism, all the toil and perplexity that belong to the exercise of cautious and candid discrimination will be at once saved; and we shall, in every instance where supernatural interposition is alleged, whatever may be the quality of the evidence, or the character of the facts, take up that vulgar and obvious explanation which is offered, by attributing a greedy credulity to the laity of those times, and a villanous and shameless knavery to the clergy. But this short and clumsy method, how satisfactory soever it may be to indolence, or how gratifying soever to malignity, can never approve itself to those who are at once well informed of facts, and accustomed to analyze evidence with precision.— The compass of human nature includes many motives—deep, and intricate, of which besotted infidelity never dreams, and which in its unobservant arrogance it can never comprehend.

Long before the time when ecclesiastical narratives of supernatural occurrences assume a

complete narrative that has come down to us of his miracles—that composed by Gregory Nyssen—is scarcely worthy of serious regard, as an historical document, not only on account of its suspicious character, but because it was written a century after the death of the great and good man, whom it labours to celebrate and really vilifies. See *the Life of Gregory Thaumag. in the Works of Greg. Nys.* Paris ed. Vol. III. p. 534.

character decidedly suspicious, or manifestly faithless, the great facts of Christianity had, with a large class of persons—especially with the recluses, become the objects of day-dream contemplation, and formed rather the furniture of a theatre of celestial machinery, than the exciting causes of simple faith, and hope, and joy. The divine glories— the brightness of the future life—the history and advocacy of the Mediator—the agency of angels, and of devils, were little else, to many, than the incentives of intellectual intoxication. When once this misuse of religious ideas had gained possession of the mind, it brought with it an irresistible prurience, asking for the marvellous just as voluptuousness asks for the aliments of pleasure. This demand will be peculiarly importunate among those who have to uphold their faith in the front of a gainsaying world.

The first step towards the pseudo-miraculous is taken without doing any violence to conscience, and little even to good sense; provided that opinions of a favouring kind are generally prevalent. Good, and even judicious men, might be so under the influence of the imagination as to have their sleep hurried with visions, and their waking meditations quickened by unearthly voices; and might complacently report such celestial favours to greedy hearers, without a particle of dishonest consciousness.* Thus the

* The two signal instances may be mentioned of Cyprian and Augustine, men, whose thorough honesty and sincerity will not be

taste for things extraordinary was at once cherished and powerfully sanctioned by the example of men eminently wise and holy. Then with an inferior class of men the progression from illusions—real and complete, to such as were in part aided by a little spontaneity and contrivance, and which, though somewhat unsatisfactory to the narrator, were devoured without scruple by the hearer, could not be difficult. The temptation to produce a commodity so much in demand was strong—often too strong for those whose moral sense had been debilitated by an habitual inebriety of the imagination. Another step towards religious fraud was more easily taken than avoided, when it was eagerly looked for by open-mouthed credulity—when the Church might cheaply and securely be glorified, and Gentilism triumphantly

questioned by any one who himself possesses the sympathies of virtue and integrity. They were both carried by the spirit of their times almost to the last stage of credulity and self-delusion; but the latter much farther than the former. While speaking of Cyprian, a passage may be quoted which confirms more than one of the statements advanced in the preceding pages. The expressions are extremely significant; they occur in the exordium of the tract, *De Disciplina et Habitu Virginum.* "Nunc nobis ad virgines sermo est, quarum quo sublimior gloria est, major et cura est. Flos est ille ecclesiastici germinis, decus atque ornamentum gratiæ spiritualis, læta indoles, laudis et honoris opus integrum, Dei imago, respondens ad sanctimoniam Domini, *illustrior portio gregis Christi.* Gaudet per illas, atque in illis largiter floret Ecclesiæ matris gloriosa fecunditas: quantoque plus copiosa virginitas numero suo addit, tanto plus gaudium matris augescit." In this eulogy there is not merely the commendation of single life, but very distinctly the doctrine of a two-fold morality—and the recognition of a patrician class in the church.

confuted. The plain ground of Christian integrity having once been abandoned, the shocks of a downward progress towards the most reprehensible extreme of deception were not likely to awaken remorse.

Practices, therefore, which, viewed in their naked merits, must excite the detestation of every Christian mind, might insensibly gain ground among those who were far from deserving the gross designation of thorough knaves. They were fervent and laborious in their zeal to propagate Christianity; they believed it cordially, and themselves hoped for eternal life in their faith, and in the strength of this hope were ready "to give their bodies to be burned." They prayed, they watched, they fasted, and crucified the flesh, and did every thing which an enthusiastical intensity of feeling could prompt;—and this feeling prompted them to promote the gospel, as well by juggling as by preaching.

But had not these religious forgers read the unbending morality of the gospel? Or, reading it, was it possible that they could think the sacrifice of honesty an acceptable offering to the God of truth? The difficulty can be solved only by calculating duly the influeuce of imaginative pietism in paralysing the conscience; and if the facts of the case seem to be still hard to comprehend, it will be necessary, for illustration, to recur to instances that may be furnished, alas! by most Christian communities in our own times.

Is it impossible to find individuals fervent, and in a certain sense sincere, in their devotions—zealous and liberal in their endeavours to diffuse Christianity, and, perhaps, in many respects amiable, who, nevertheless, admit into their habitual course of conduct some very gross contrarieties to the plainest rules of Christian morality? When instances of this sort are under discussion, it is alike unsatisfactory to affirm of the parties in question, that they are, in the common sense of the term, hypocrites; or to grant that their piety is genuine, but defective. The first supposition, though it may cut the difficulty, does not by any means nicely accord with the facts: and the second puts contempt upon the most explicit and solemn declarations of our Lord and his ministers, whose style of enforcing the divine law will never allow those who are flagrantly vicious—those who are "workers of iniquity,"—to be called "imperfect Christians."

Our alternative presents itself for the solution of the pressing difficulty. The religion of these delinquent professors is sincere in its kind, and perhaps fervent; but not less fictitious than sincere. Or rather the religion they profess is not Christianity, but an image of it. Whatever there is in the Gospel that may stimulate emotion without breaking up the conscience, has been admitted and felt; but the heart has not been made "alive towards God." Repentance has had no force, the desire of pardon no intensity.

Certain vices may be shunned and reprobated, and others as freely indulged; for nothing is really inconsistent with the dreams of religious delusion—except the waking energy of true virtue. And thus it was with many in the ancient Church:—the stupendous objects of the unseen world had kindled the imagination; and in harmony with this state of mind, a supernatural heroism and unnatural style of virtue were admired and practised, because they fed the flames of a fictitious happiness which compensated for the renunciation of the pleasures of sense. In this spirit martyrdom was courted, and deserts were peopled until they ceased to be solitudes; and in this spirit also miracles were affirmed, or fabricated, not so often by knaves, as by visionaries.

The subject of the suspicious pretensions to miraculous power advanced by many of the ancient Christian writers should not be dismissed without remarking, that it is one thing to compose a gaudy narrative *(de virtutibus)* of the wonder-working powers of a saint, gone to his rest in the preceding century; and another to be the actor in scenes of religious juggling. If this distinction be duly considered, a very large mass of perplexing matter will be at once discharged from the page of ecclesiastical history, and that without doing the smallest violence either to charity, or to the laws of evidence. Some foolish Presbyter or busy Monk, gifted with a talent of

description, has collected the church-tales, current in his time, concerning a renowned father. The turgid biography, applauded in the monastery where it was produced, slipped away silently to the faithful of distant establishments, and without having ever undergone that ordeal of *real and local publicity* which authenticates common history, was diffused, as it were, beneath the surface of notoriety, through Christendom, and so has come down to modern times—to load the memory of some good man with unmerited disgrace.*

* One important rule of procedure in relation to the ancient narratives of miracles has been just referred to, *note to page* 236. A second is to quash all serious consideration of those which exist only in biographies composed in a turgid style of laudatory exaggeration, and not published, or not fairly and fully published, till long after the deaths of the operator, and of the witnesses. An instance precisely in point has already been mentioned, namely, the life of Gregory of Neocæsarea, by Gregory Nyssen: another of like kind has also here been frequently quoted—the life of St. Martin, by Sulpitius Severus: the life of Cyprian, by the Deacon Pontius, might be included; and perhaps that of St. Anthony, by Athanasius. A perusal of the last-mentioned tract, which fills only some fifty or sixty pages, would convey a more exact and vivid idea of the state and style of religion in the fourth century, than is to be obtained by reading volumes of modern compilations of Church history. See *Athan. Op.* Vol. II. p. 790. (Paris edition.) At once the piety and the strong sense of the writer, and the extraordinary character of the narrative, give it a peculiar claim to attention. Let the intelligent reader of this curious document take the occasion to estimate the value and amount of the information that is to be received from modern writers—Mosheim and Milner, for example, of whom the first gives the mere husk of history, and the other nothing but some separated particles of pure farina. But can we in either of these methods obtain the solid and safe instruction which a *true* knowledge of human character and

V. The practice of mystifying the Scriptures must be named as an especial characteristic of monkish religion.

This practice was, in the first place, the natural fruit of a life like that of the recluses: for the Bible is a directory of common life—the heavenly enchiridion of those who are beset with the cares, labours, sorrows, and temptations, of the world. To the anchoret it presents almost a blank page: a style of existence so unnatural as that which he has chosen, it does not recognize; his imaginary troubles, his frivolous duties, his visionary temptations, his self-inflicted sufferings, and his real difficulty of maintaining virtue under the galling friction of a presumptuous vow, are all absolutely unknown to the Scriptures, which therefore, to the recluse, are *not* profitable for reproof, or correction, or for instruction in the false righteousness which he labours to establish.

conduct should convey? It may be very edifying to read some pages of picked sentiments of piety; but do these culled portions, which actually belie the mass whence they are taken, communicate what an intelligent reader of history looks for—namely, a real picture and image of mankind in past ages? Certainly not. If nothing be wanted but pleasing expressions of Christian feeling, there can be no need to make a painful search for them in the bulky tomes of the Greek and Latin fathers. Nevertheless, with all its very great defects, Milner's Church History is incomparably the best that has ever been compiled." Led astray at every step by the malignant falsifications of Gibbon, and very partially informed of facts by Church historians, the modern reader has no means of correctly estimating the state of Christianity in remote times;—or none but that of examining *for himself* the literary remains of ecclesiastical antiquity.

To adapt the Bible to the cell, it must, of necessity, be allegorized. Then indeed it is made inexhaustibly rich in the materials of spiritual amusement. It was thus that the Jewish doctors, the authors of the Talmudical writings, found the means of diverting the heaviness of their leisure: and it was thus, though in a different style, that the Essenes of the wilderness of the Jordan wiled away the hours of their solitude: and thus, yet again after another pattern, the Christian monks, especially those of Palestine* and Egypt, transmuted the words of truth and soberness into a tangled wreath of flimsy fable.

The doctrine of a mystical sense has invariably been espoused by every successive body of idle religionists; that is to say, by all who spurning or forgetting the authority which the Scriptures assert over the life and conscience, convert them into the materials of a delicious dream. The mask of allegory imposed on the Bible serves first as a source of entertainment, and then as a shelter against the plain meaning of all those passages which directly condemn the will-worship, the fooleries, and the extravagances to which persons of this temper are ever addicted. So did the Rabbis make void the law of God; so did the

* Origen, as every one knows, led the way in the Christian Church in this mode of interpretation. It is also well known that the monks, especially those of Alexandria, warmly espoused the cause of this ingenious writer against the bishops and clergy, who as warmly condemned his works as heretical.

monks; so have all classes of modern mystics;—so do modern Antinomians: all have asserted a double, a treble, or a quadruple sense;—a mystery couched beneath every narrative, and every exhortation, or even hidden in single words: or they have descried a profound doctrine packed in the bend of a *Samech* or a *Koph*. Not one of the absurdities of the ancient monkery has been so long-lived as this: nor is there to be found a more certain symptom of the existence of fatal illusion in matters of religion.

VI. The monkish system recommended itself by astonishing feats of devotedness, and by great proficiency in the practices of artificial and spontaneous virtue.

The motives of enthusiasm are so much more congruous with the unreformed impulses of human nature than are the principles of genuine piety, that the former have usually far surpassed the latter in the difficult and mortifying achievements of self-denial. In proportion as a system of fanaticism is remote from truth, its stimulating force is found to be great. Thus the fakirs of India have carried the feats of voluntary torture far beyond any other order of religionists. Mahometans, generally, are more zealous, devout, and fervent, than Christians. Romanists surpass Protestants in the solemnity, intensity, and scrupulosity of their devotional exercises. In conformity with this well-known principle the

monastic orders have, in all ages, had to boast of some prodigious instances of mortification, or of charitable heroism. And the boast might be allowed to win more praise than can be granted to it, if there were not manifest, invariably, in these egregious exploits, a ferment of sinister feelings, quite incompatible with the simplicity and purity of Christian virtue.

For example, let a comparison be drawn between a daughter who, in the deep seclusion of private life, and without a spectator to applaud her virtue, devotes cheerfully her prime of years to the service of an afflicted parent;—and the nun, who inveigles beggars daily to the convent, where she absolves them, against their will, from their filth, dresses their ulcers, and cleanses their tatters; assuredly the part she performs is more seemingly difficult, and far more revolting than that of the pious daughter. Yet is it in fact more easy; for the inflated "sister of charity",* is sustained and impelled by notions of heroism, and of celestial excellence, and by a present recompense of fame in her sisterhood, of all which the other does not dream, who, if she possessed not the substantial motives of true goodness, could never in this manner win the blessing of heaven.

Self-inflicted penances, wasteful abstinences, fruitless labours, sanctimonious humiliations, and

* The charitable offices of the nuns in the hospitals of France ought always to be mentioned with respect and admiration.

all such like spontaneities, may fairly be classed with those painful and perilous sports, in pursuing which it often happens that a greater amount of suffering is endured, and of danger incurred, than ordinarily belongs to the services and duties of real life. But these freaks of the monastery, and these toils of the field, deserve little praise, seeing that they meet their immediate reward in the gratification of a peculiar taste. In both instances the adult child pleases himself in his own way, and must be deemed to do much if he avoids trampling down the rights of his neighbour.

Fictitious virtue, if formed on the model of the Koran, naturally assumes the style of martial arrogance, of fanatical zeal, and of bluff devotion. But if it be the Gospels that furnish the pattern, then an opposite phase of sanctity is shown.—Abject lowliness, and voluntary poverty (which is no poverty at all), and ingenious austerities, and romantic exploits of charity, and other similar misinterpretations of the spirit and letter of New Testament morality, are combined to form a tattered and tawdry effigy of the humility, purity, and beneficence of Christian holiness. But compel the imitator to relinquish all that is heroic, and picturesque, and poetical in his style of behaviour; oblige him to lay aside whatever makes the vulgar gape at his sanctity; let him uncowl his ears, and cover his naked feet: ask him to acquit himself patiently, faithfully, christianly, amid the non-illustrious and difficult duties of common life, and

he will find himself destitute of motive and of zest for his daily task. Temperance without abstinence will have no charm for him; nor purity without a vow; nor self-denial without austerity; nor patience without stoicism; nor charity without a trumpet. The man of sackcloth, who was a prodigy of holiness in the cloister, becomes, if transported into the sphere of domestic life, a monster of selfishness and sensuality.

Time, which insensibly aggravates the abuses of every corrupt system, does also furnish an apology—more and more valid from age to age, for the conduct of the individuals who spring up in succession to act their parts within its machinery. While ancient institutions rest tranquilly on their bases, while venerable usages obtain unquestioned submission, while opinion paces forwards with a slumbering step upon its deep-worn tracks, men are not more conscious of the enormity of the errors that may be chargeable upon their creeds and practices, than a secluded tribe is of the strangeness and inelegance of the national costume. This principle should never be lost sight of when we are estimating the personal character of the members of the Romish Church before the period of the Reformation; or indeed in later times, where no free and fair conflict of opinions has taken place. The system and its victims are always to be thought of apart.

A recurrence, on the part of a people at large, to abstract principles of political or religious truth, is a much less frequent event than the rarest of natural phenomena. It is only in consequence of shocks happening in the social system, by no means so often as earthquakes do in the material, that the human mind is rent from its habitudes, and placed in a position whence it may with advantage compare its opinions with universal truth. The Christian Church underwent not once the perils and benefits of such a convulsion during the long course of fifteen hundred years. Throughout that protracted space of time the men of each age, with few exceptions, quietly deemed that to be good which their fathers had thought so; and as naturally delivered it to their successors, endorsed with their own solemn approbation. In forming an opinion therefore of the merits of individuals, justice — we need not say candour, demands that the whole, or almost the whole amount of the abstract error of the system within which, by accident of birth, they move, should be deducted from the reckoning. This sort of justice may especially be claimed in behalf of those who rather acquiesced in the religious modes of their times, than appeared as its active champions. Thus we excuse the originators and early supporters of a bad system, on the ground of their ignorance of its evil tendency and actual

consequences;* and again we palliate the fault of its adherents in a late age, by pleading for them the influence of that natural sentiment of respect which is paid to antiquity.

These proper allowances being made, there will be no difficulty in turning from an indignant reprobation of the monkish practices, to a charitable and consoling belief of the personal virtues and even eminent piety of many who, in every age, have fretted away an unblessed existence within that dungeon of religious delusion—the monastery. In default of complete evidence, yet on the ground of some substantial proof, it is allowable to hope that the monastic orders at all times included many spiritual members.† There is even reason to believe that a better style of sentiment, and less extravagance, less fanatical

* Perhaps the treatment which Jovinian and Vigilantius received from Jerom, Ambrose, and Augustine, may be thought to detract very much from the validity of the apology here offered for the ancient abettors of monachism. But the circumstances of the case are involved in too much obscurity to allow a distinct opinion to be formed on the subject. The protest of Jovinian against the prevailing errors of the Church might be connected with some extravagance of belief, or some impropriety of conduct which prevented his testimony from being listened to with respect. Yet certainly the *appearances* of the case show decidely against both Jerom and Ambrose. Augustine knew little personally of the (supposed) error against which he inveighed.

† The "De Imitatione Christi" alone affords proof enough of the possibility of the existence of elevated piety in the monastery. It abounds also with indications of the petty persecution to which a spiritual monk was exposed among his brethren.

heat, less knavish pretension, and more of humility and purity, existed here and there among the recluses of the tenth and eleventh, than among those of the fifth and sixth centuries.

In the earlier period, though there might be much *pretension* to seclusion from the world, the monastery was in fact a house set on a hill in the midst of the christian community; and was ever surrounded by an admiring multitude; and its inmates might always find a ready revenue of glorification for the exploits and hypocrisies of supernatural sanctity.* But in the later periods, and when nothing hardly existed without doors except feudal ignorance and ferocity—we speak of the monasteries of Europe—many of the religious houses were real seclusions, and very far removed from any market of vulgar praise. Then within these establishments, it cannot be doubted, that the pious few found their virtue much rather guarded by the envious eyes of their less exemplary comrades, than endangered by drawing upon itself any sort of admiration.

* Many of the ancient *solitaries*, far from living as their profession required, in seclusion, were accustomed to admit daily the visits of the multitude who flocked around them, to gaze at their austerities—to hear their harangues, or to be exorcised, or healed of their maladies. Symeon, "the man of the pillar," every day exhibited himself to a gaping crowd, collected often from distant countries. St. Anthony, more sincere in his love of retirement, when pestered by the plaudits of the vulgar in Lower Egypt, withdrew into a desert of the Thebais; yet even there he soon found himself surrounded, not only by demons, but worse, by admirers. See *Athan. Op.* Vol. II. p. 833.

The spiritual Monk (let not modern prejudices refuse to admit the phrase) glad to hide himself from the railleries or spite of the lax fraternity, kept close to his cell, and there passed his hours—not uncheered, nor undelicious—in prayer and meditation; in the perusal of religious books, and in the pleasant, edifying, and beneficial toils of transcription. Not seldom, as is proved by abundant evidence, the life-giving words of prophets and apostles were the subjects of these labours; nor ought it to be doubted that while, through a long tract of centuries, the Scriptures—unknown abroad, were holding their course under-ground—if one might so speak, waiting the time of their glorious emerging, they imparted the substance of true knowledge to many souls, pent with them in the same sepulchral glooms.

The monkish system retained its ancient style, with little alteration, until it received an enhancement and somewhat new character in France, in the hands of the followers of Jansen, and the Port Royal recluses. Then the old doctrine of religious abstraction—of the merging of the soul in Deity, and of the merit and efficacy of penitential suicide, was revived with an intensity never before known, was recommended by a much larger admixture of genuine scriptural knowledge than had ever before been connected with the same system, and was graced by the

brilliant talents and great learning of many of the party: while at the same time the endurance of persecution gave depth, force, and heroism, to the sentiments of the sect.

It was inevitable that whatever of good might arise within the Church of Rome, and remain in allegiance to it, must pass over to the ancient and venerated form of monkish piety. The religion of the monastery was the only sort of devotedness and seriousness known to, or sanctioned by that Church. A new sect of fervent religionists could therefore do no otherwise than either fall into that style, or denounce it; and the latter would have been to break from Rome, and to side with Hugonots.

Embarrassed at every step by their professed submission to the authority of the Popes, which they perpetually felt to be at variance with the duty they owed to God, and heavily oppressed and galled by their necessary acquiescence in the flagrant errors of the Church in which alone they thought salvation could be had, and still more deeply injured by their own zealously loved ascetic doctrine, these good men obtained possession, and made profession of the great truths of Christianity under an incomparably heavier weight of disadvantage than has been sustained by any other class of Christians from the apostolic to the present times. They have left in their voluminous and valuable writings, a body of divinity, doctrinal and practical, which, when

the peculiar circumstances of its production are considered, presents a matchless proof of the intrinsic power of Christianity, upbearing so ponderous a mass of error.

Nevertheless, while the Port Royal divines and their friends are perused with pleasure and advantage, and while the reader is often inclined to admit that in depth, fervour, and solemnity of religious feeling, in richness and elevation of thought, in holy abstraction from earthly interests, in devotedness of zeal, and in the exemplification of some difficult duties, they much surpass the divines of England, he still feels, and sometimes when he can hardly assign the grounds of his dissatisfaction, that a vein of illusiveness runs through every page. Though the great principles of religion are much more distinctly and more feelingly produced than generally they are in the writings of the Fathers, though the evidence of genuine and exalted piety is abundant and unquestionable; yet is there an infection of *idealism*, tainting every sentiment; a mist of the imagination, obscuring every doctrine. In turning from the French writers of this school to our own standard divines, the reader is conscious of a sensation that might be compared to that felt by one who escapes into pure air from a chamber in which, though it was possible to live, respiration was oppressed by the presence of mephitic exhalations.

Enfeebled by the enthusiasm to which they so

fondly clung, the piety of these admirable men failed in the force necessary to carry them triumphantly through the conflict with their atrocious enemy—"the Society." They were themselves in too many points vulnerable, to close fearlessly with their adversary; and they grasped the sword of the Spirit in too infirm a manner to be able to drive home a deadly thrust. Had it been otherwise—had they been free, not merely from the shackle of submission to Rome, but free from the debilitating influence of mysticism and monkish notions, their moral force, their talent, their learning, and their self-devotion, might have sufficed, first to the overthrow of their immediate antagonist, whose bad cause and worse arguments were hardly supported against the augmenting weight of public opinion, even by the whole power of the court. Then might they, not improbably, have supplied the impulse necessary to achieve the emancipation of the Gallican Church from the thraldom of Rome; an event which seemed more than once on the eve of accomplishment. And if at the same moment the Protestants of France had received just that degree of indulgence—of mere sufferance, which was demanded, we do not say by justice and mercy, but by a common regard to the national welfare; and if by these means a substantially sound, though perhaps partial reform had taken place within the dominant Church, and dissent been allowed to spread itself

amicably through the interstices of the ecclesiastical structure;—if religious liberty—not indeed in the temper of republican contumacy, but in the christian spirit of quiet and grateful humility, had taken root in France, is it too much to say that Atheism could never have become, as it did, the national opinion, and that the consequent solution of the social system in blood could never have happened?

The Jansenists and the inmates of Port Royal, and many of their favourers, displayed a constancy that would doubtless have carried them through the fires of martyrdom. But the intellectual courage necessary to bear them fearlessly through an examination of the errors of the papal superstition could spring only from a healthy force of mind, utterly incompatible with the dotings of religious abstraction, with the petty solicitudes of sackclothed abstinence, with the trivial ceremonials of the daily ritual, with the prim niceties of behaviour that pin down the body and soul of a Romish regular to his parchment-pattern of artificial sanctity. The Jansenists had not such courage: if they worshipped not the beast, they cringed before him: he planted his dragon-foot upon their necks, and their wisdom and their virtues were lost for ever to France.

The monk of Wittemberg had taken a bolder and a better course. When he began to find fault with Rome, he rejected not only its own

flagrant and recent corruptions; but the specious delusions it had inherited from the ancient church; and after a short struggle with the prejudices of education, he became, not only no papist, but no monk. Full fraught with the principles and spirit of the Bible, he denounced as well the venerable errors of the fathers, as the scarlet sins of the mother of impurities: and was as little a disciple of Jerom, of Gregory, and of Basil, as of the doctors of the Vatican.

The English reformers trod the ground of theological enquiry with the same manly step; and that firm step shook the monasteries to the dust. Those great and good men went back to the Scriptures, where they found at once the great realities of religion — a condemning law, a justifying Gospel, and a provision of grace for a life of true holiness. With these substantial principles in their hearts, they spurned whatever was trivial and spurious, and amid the fires of persecution, reared the structure — a structure still unshaken, of religion for England, upon "the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Had there existed a taste for mysticism, a fondness for penitential austerities, a cringing deference to the fathers, among the divines of the time of Edward VI., such a disposition must, so far as known causes are to be calculated upon, have utterly spoiled the reformatior in England; or have postponed it a hundred years.

Additional Note.—The almost incredible extent to which the religious delusion of the times had vitiated the common sense of Christians, is strikingly displayed in the sort of opposition that was sometimes made to the prevailing notions. Thus we find the Fathers, in the midst of their sophistical and absurd encomiums of celibacy, now and then putting in a saving plea for marriage. But how immense an aberration from right reason must have taken place before there could be any need for such apologies. The Scriptures declare that, "God formed man, male and female, and blessed them, and said, Be fruitful and multiply." In not less explicit terms our Lord authenticates the sacredness of the conjugal union, "a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife:" and the apostle of the Lord, authoritatively affirms that marriage is honourable in all; and he enjoins a Bishop to be "the husband of one wife." Nevertheless, and in contempt of the plainest evidence, Christian teachers, within three or four generations of the apostolic age, are found, almost universally attempting to make void the law of God, by their inventions; or if compelled to acknowledge its authority, yet doing so in an indirect and reluctant manner.

Some of the favourers of monkery were so impiously bold, as to call marriage "a doctrine of the devil." But this horrible audacity is strongly reprobated by those who mention it. Theodoret speaks of the sentiment as wickedly heretical, and no reputable writer can be charged with advancing so profane an opinion. Clemens Alexandrinus condemns those who inveigh against the institution of God, which is, he says, *αναγκαιω βοηθὸς* and *λιμην σωφροσυνης*; and contents himself with lauding the superior merit, purity, and advantage of the single life. Cyril of Jerusalem has been already quoted to the same effect. Gregory Nyssen, Orat. 31, looks about and finds an apology for the divine appointment of matrimony on this ground, "that it is the means of bringing into the world those who may serve and please God." Chrysostom allows, Hom. 26, that *ὁ γαμος ουδεν κωλυει την αρετην*. Theophylact speaks to the same purpose; and many others save their consistency in professing to submit to the authority of scripture, by occasional admissions of the same sort. And yet, whenever a solitary voice was raised in reprehension of the fundamental principles of monkery, it was presently lost amid the din and angry clamours of fanatical zeal. The natural and very momentous question—"are these practices authorised by the word of God?" seems never once, from the days of Cyprian to the time of the Reformation, to have been fairly and calmly discussed. With such

an instance before us of the infatuating power of religious illusion, ought not the church in every age to entertain a constant jealousy of itself; and especially when on any point of belief or practice a reluctance is felt to abide by the consequences of an appeal to scripture? Happily, in the age in which we live, if there be not on all hands a perfect simplicity of deference to the Bible, there is a nearer approach to it than has perhaps ever existed *diffusedly* through the church since the days of the apostles: and happily also, there are strong indications on all sides of an *increasing* deference to the only standard of truth and morals. This, by eminence, is the bright omen of the times.

SECTION X.

HINTS ON THE PROBABLE TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIANITY, SUBMITTED ESPECIALLY TO THOSE WHO MISUSE THE TERM, ENTHUSIASM.

To wave the exercise of discrimination, can, under no imaginable circumstances, be advantageous to any man: nor is it ever otherwise than absurd to persist in an error which might be corrected by a moment's attention to obvious facts. But some such suspension of good sense has manifestly taken place with those who accustom themselves to designate, in a mass, as Enthusiasts, the many thousands of their countrymen, of all communions, at the present time making profession of the doctrines of the Reformation.

All who are not wilfully ignorant must know that what is vulgarly called "the religious world," now includes, not only myriads of the lower, and middle, and imperfectly educated classes, in relation to whom self-complacent arrogance may easily find pretexts of scorn; — and not only many of the opulent and the noble; but a fair proportion also of all the talent, and learning, and brilliancy of mind, that adorns the professional

circles, and that vivifies the literature of the country. What appropriateness is there then left to language, if a phrase of supercilious import is to be attached to the names of men of vigorous understanding, and energetic character, and eminent acquirement;—of men, successful in their several courses, and accomplished in whatever gives grace to human nature? When those, who are in no assignable good quality inferior to their competitors on the arena of life, are, on account of their religious opinions and practices, called Enthusiasts, is it not evident that nothing is actually effected but the annulling of the contumelious power of the term so misused? We may indeed in this manner neutralise the significance of a word, or draw upon ourselves the imputation of malignant prejudice; but we cannot reduce from their rank those who stand firmly on the high stages of literary or philosophical eminence.

But if arrogance and malignity itself be ashamed of so flagrant an abuse of the word Enthusiast; then neither ought that epithet (unless where special proof can be adduced) to be assigned to the multitude—holding the very same opinions: for the eminent few, seeing that they profess these tenets and adhere to these practices deliberately, and explicitly, must be allowed the privilege of redeeming their belief and usages from contempt, by whomsoever maintained.

An opinion gravely professed by a man of sense and education, demands respectful consideration—demands and actually receives it from all whose own sense and education give them a correlative right: and whoever offends against this sort of courtesy may fairly be deemed to have forfeited the privileges it secures. But retaliation is declined by those who might use it, and it is declined on the ground not only of christian meekness, but of commiseration towards such violators of candour and good manners, whom they hold to be acting under the influence of an infatuation, at once deplorable and fatal.

That this infatuation should, in any great number of instances, be dispelled by the mere showing of reasons, is what the religionists—the enthusiasts, are by no means so enthusiastical as to expect:—they too well understand the nature of the malady, and too well know its inveteracy, to imagine that it may be dissipated by argument, even though the cause were in the hands of a college of dialecticians. And yet, though they entertain no such expectation as this, they—the religionists—do very generally, and with some degree of confidence, entertain the belief that, ere very long, the *error* of irreligion will be seen universally, and that Christianity, or, for the sake of distinctness, let it be said the religion of the Reformation, the religion of Wickliffe, and Latimer, and Cranmer, and Jewel, and Hooker, and Owen, and Howe, and Baxter,

will gain unquestioned ascendency—will bear down infidelity and heresy, and absorb schism, and possess itself of Christendom;—and of the family of man.

In support of this belief many reasons may be urged, some of which can be expected to have weight only with the religious; while others may well claim attention from all, whatever may be their opinion of Christianity, who are at once competent and accustomed to anticipate the probable course of human affairs.

There are three distinct methods in which an inquiry of this sort may be conducted: of these, the first, is the method of philosophical calculation, on the known principles of human nature, and which, without either denying or assuming the truth of Christianity, forecasts, from past events and present appearances, the probable futurity. To pursue such calculations efficiently, prepossessions of all kinds, both sceptical and religious, should be held in abeyance, while the naked facts that belong to the problem are contemplated as from the remoteness of a neutral position.

The reader and writer of this page may each have formed his estimate of the intrinsic force and validity of certain opinions; but this private estimate may happen to be much above, or much below the level which perfect reason would approve; and, be it what it may, it can avail nothing for our present purpose. If we are to calculate the probable extension or extinction of

those opinions, we must consult the evidence of facts on a large scale; and especially must observe what manifestations of *intrinsic power* they have given on certain peculiar and critical occasions. This is the only course that can be deemed satisfactory, or that is conformed to the procedures of modern science. We do not now wish to ask a seraph if such or such a dogma is held to be true in heaven; what we have to do is to learn from the suffrage of the millions of mankind whether it has a permanent power to command and to regain ascendency over the human mind. This question must be asked of history, and we must take care to open the book at those pages where the great eras of religious revolution are described. Having glanced at the past, our next business will be to look at the present:—this kind of divination is the only one known to the principles of philosophical inquiry.

The early triumph of the Gospel over the fascinating idolatries and the astute atheism of Greece and Rome, has been often (and conclusively) insisted upon, as evidence of its truth. With that argument we have nothing now to do; but if the subject were not a very hackneyed one, it might well be brought forward, in all its details, in proof of a different point—namely, the innate power of the religion of the Bible to vanquish the hearts of men. An opponent may here choose his alternative;—either let him grant

that Christianity triumphed because it was true and divine; or let him deny that it had any aid from heaven. In the former case we shall be entitled to infer that the religion of God must at length universally prevail; or in the latter, strongly argue that this doctrine possesses little less than an omnipotence of intrinsic force; by which it obtained success under circumstances of opposition, such as made its triumph seem even to its enemies miraculous: and on this ground the expectation of its future prevalence cannot be thought unreasonable.

But if there were room to imagine that the first spread of Christianity was owing rather to an accidental conjuncture of favouring circumstances, than to its real power over the human mind; or if it might be thought that any such peculiar virtue was all spent and exhausted in its first expansive effort, then it is natural to look to the next occasion in which the opinions of mankind were put in fermentation, and to watch in what manner the system of the Bible rode over the high billows of political, religious, and intellectual commotion. It was a fair trial for Christianity, and a trial essentially different from its first, when in the fifteenth century, after having been corrupted in every part to a state of loathsome ulceration, it had to contend for existence, and to work its own renovation, at the moment of the most extraordinary expansion of the human intellect that has ever happened.

At that moment when the splendid literature of the ancient world started from its tomb, and kindled a blaze of universal admiration; at that moment when the first beams of sound philosophy broke over the nations; and when the revival of the useful arts gave at once elasticity to the minds of the million, and a check of practical influence to the minds of the few; at the moment when the necromancy of the press came into play to expose and explode necromancy of every other kind; and when the discovery of new continents, and of a new path to the old, tended to supplant a taste for whatever is visionary, by imparting a vivid taste for what is substantial; at such a time, which seemed to leave no chance of continued existence to aught that was not in its nature vigorous, might it not confidently have been said—This must be the crisis of Christianity?—If it be not inwardly sound—if it have not a true hold of human nature—if it be a thing of feebleness and dotage, fit only for cells, and cowls, and the precincts of spiritual despotism;—if it be not adapted to the world of action, if it have no sympathy with the feelings of men—of freemen;—nothing can save it: no power of princes, no devices of priests, will avail to rear it anew, and to replace it in the veneration of the people; at least not in any country, where has been felt the freshening gale of intellectual life. The result of this crisis need not be narrated.

It may even be doubted—had not Christianity been fraught with power—if all the influence of kings, and craft of priests could have upheld it in *any* part of Europe, after the revival of learning; certainly not in those countries which received at the same time the invigoration of political liberty, and science, and commerce.

Whether the religion for which the reformers suffered, "was from heaven or of men," is not our question; but whether it is not a religion of robust constitution, framed to endure, and to spread, and to vanquish the hearts of men? With the history of the fifteenth and sixteenth century in view, it is asked if Christianity is a system that must always lean upon ignorance, and craft, and despotism, and which, when those rotten stays are removed, must fail and be seen no more?

Yet another species of trial was in store to give proof of the indestructibility and victorious power of Christianity. It remained to be seen whether, when the agitations, political and moral, consequent upon the great schism which had taken place in Europe had subsided, and when the season of slumber and exhaustion came on, and when human reason, strengthened and refined by physical science and elegant literature, should awake fully to the consciousness of its powers; whether then the religion of the Bible could retain its hold of the nations;—or at least of those of them that enjoyed without limit the

happy influences of political liberty, and intellectual light. This was a sort of probation which Christianity had never before passed through.

And what were the omens under which it entered upon the new trial of its strength? Were the friends of Christianity at that moment of portentous conflict awake, and vigilant, and stout-hearted, and thoroughly armed to repel assaults? The very reverse was the fact. For at the instant when the atheistical conspiracy made its long-concerted, and well-advised and consentaneous, and furious attack, there was scarcely a pulse of life left in the Christian body, in any one of the Protestant states. The old superstitions had crawled back into many of their ancient corners. In other quarters the spirit of protestation against those superstitions had breathed itself away in trivial wranglings, or had given place to infidelity—infidelity aggravated by stalled hypocrisy. The Church of England—the chief prop of modern Christianity, was then torpid, and fainting under the incubus of false doctrine and of a secular spirit, and seemed incapable of the effort which the peril of the time demanded: few indeed of her sons were panoplied, and sound hearted, as champions in such a cause should be. Within a part only of a small body of Dissenters (for a part was smitten with the plague of heresy) and that part in great measure disqualified from free and energetic action by rigidities, and scruples, and divisions—

was contained almost all the religious life and fervour any where to be found in Christendom.

Meanwhile the infidel machinators had chosen their ground at leisure, and were wrought to the highest pitch of energy by a confident, and as it might well seem, a well-founded hope of success. They were backed by the secret wishes, or the undissembled cheerings of almost the entire body of educated men throughout Europe. They used the only language then common to the civilized world, and a language which might be imagined to have been framed and finished designedly to accomplish the demolition of whatever was grave and venerated;—a language, beyond any other, of raillery, of insinuation, and of sophistry; a language of polished missiles, whose temper could penetrate not only the cloak of imposture, but the shield of truth.

At the same portentous moment the shocks and upheavings of political commotion opened a thousand fissures in the ancient structure of moral and religious sentiment, and the enemies of Christianity, surprised by unexpected success, rushed forward to achieve an easy triumph. The firmest and the wisest friends of old opinions desponded, and many probably believed that a few years would see Atheism the universal doctrine of the western nations, as well as military depotism the only form of government.

It is hard to imagine a single advantage that was lacking to the promoters of infidelity, or

a single circumstance of peril and ill-omen that was not present to deepen the gloom of the friends of religion. The actual issue of that signal crisis is before our eyes in the freshness of a recent event. Christianity—we ask not whether for the benefit or the injury of the world—has triumphed; the mere fact is all that concerns our argument. But shall it be said—or if said, believed, that the late resurrection of the religion of the Bible has been managed in the cabinets of monarchs? Have kings and emperors given this turn to public opinion, which now compels infidelity to hide its shame behind the very mask of hypocrisy that it had so lately torn from the face of the priest? To come home to facts with which all must be familiar;—has there not been heard, within the last few years, from the most enlightened, the most sober minded, and the freest people of Europe, a firm, articulate, spontaneous, and cordial expression of preference, and of enhanced veneration towards Christianity? Again then we ask—not if this religion be true, but if it have not, even beneath our own observation, given proof of indestructible vigour?

The spread of the English stock, and language, and literature, over the North American continent, has afforded a distinct and very significant indication of the power of Christianity to retain its hold of the human mind, and of its aptness to run hand-in-hand with civilization, even when unaided by those secular succours to which its

enemies in malice, and some of its friends in over-caution, are prone to attribute too much importance. The tendency of republicanism, which obviously has some strong affinity with infidelity—and the connexion of the colonies, at the moment of their revolt, with France—and the prevalence of a peculiarly eager and uncorrected commercial temper—and the absence of every sort and semblance of restraint upon opinion—were concurrent circumstances, belonging to the infancy of the American Union, of a kind which put to the severest test the intrinsic power of Christianity, in retaining its hold of the human mind. Could infidel experimenters have wished for conditions more equitable under which to try the respective forces of the opposing systems?

And what has been the issue? It is true that infidelity holds still its ground in the United States, as in Europe, and there, as in Europe, keeps company with whatever is debauched, sordid, oppressive, reckless, ruffian-like. But at the same time Christianity has gained rather than lost ground, and shows itself there in a style of as much fervour and zeal as in England;—and perhaps, even has the advantage in these respects. Wherever, on that continent, good order and intelligence are spreading, there also the religion of the Bible spreads. And if it be probable that the English race, and language, and institutions, will, in a century, pervade its deserts, all

appearances favour the belief that the edifices of Christian worship will bless every landscape of the present wilderness that shall then "blossom as the rose."

Before, in pursuing this method of frigid calculation, the Christian doctrine be weighed against the several systems with which it must contend ere it wins its universal triumph, it is proper to inquire—what is the probability that a collision will actually take place. To estimate fairly this probability, those who are but slenderly acquainted with the religious world—in the British Islands, in America, and in the Protestant states of the continent, must understand, much better than generally they do, the precise nature of the remarkable revolution that has, within the last thirty years, been effected in the sentiments of Christians on the subject of the diffusion of their religion. Such slenderly informed persons may very naturally imagine that the prodigious efforts that have of late been made to diffuse Christianity through the world have sprung simply from a heat and excitement, in its nature transient, and which, therefore, must be expected soon to subside. But this supposition will be found to be incomplete and erroneous. A stir and kindling of feeling has no doubt happened, but this feeling, and the activities which followed from it, have given occasion to the resurrection, so to speak, of a capital article of Christian

morals, which, after lying almost latent for centuries, now stands forth in undisputed and prominent authority in the code of religious duty. This recovered principle is now constantly recognized and enforced, and is seen to exert its influence, not merely within the upper circles of central movement, but even in the remotest orbits of religious feeling, where warmth and energy are manifestly not excessive.

The founder of Christianity left with his disciples the unlimited injunction to go forth into all the world and to preach the Gospel to every creature. This command, corroborated by others of equivalent import, and enforced by the very nature of the Christian doctrine, and by the spirit of Christian charity, is now understood and acknowledged—in a manner new to the Church —to be of universal obligation, so that no Christian, how obscure soever may be his station, or small his talents, or limited his means, can be held to stand altogether excused from the duty of fulfilling, in some way, the last mandate of his Lord. Thus understood, this command makes every believer a preacher and a missionary, or at least obliges him to see to it, so far as his ability extends, that the labours of diffusive evangelization are actually performed by a substitute.

Before the commencement of the recent missionary efforts, there had been missions to the heathen. But these, if carried on with any thing more than a perfunctionary assiduity, were

anomalous to the general feeling of Christians, and rested on the exemplary zeal of individuals. But the modern missions are maintained, neither by the zeal of the few, nor by the *mere zeal* of the many; but rather by the deep-seated impulsive power of a grave and irresistible conviction, pressing on the conscience even of the inert and the selfish; and much more on the hearts of the fervent and devoted—That a Christian has no more liberty to withhold his aid and service from these evangelizing associations, than he has to abandon the duties of common life; and that, for a man to profess hope in Christ, and to deny what he might spare to promote the diffusion of the Gospel, is the most egregious of all practical solecisms.

Those who are ignorant of this remarkable revolution of sentiment, or who may be sceptical concerning it, would do well to take up at hazard any dozen of the discourses, and reports, and tracts, that are yearly, and monthly, and weekly, flooding from the religious press, among which they will hardly find one that does not assume this as an admitted principle, and as the ultimate and irresistible motive of every hortatory appeal. And if among these ephemera, there are any—and such are not seldom to be found, that bear the stamp of superior intelligence, it will be seen almost invariably, that the reasoner summons all the force of his mind—not indeed to prove that every Christian is bound to promote the diffusion

of scriptural knowledge, but by some new ingenuity of illustration, to place the acknowledged duty in a stronger light, or to show in what manner it bears upon the specific object for which he pleads. And it is to be noted that these popular addresses exhibit, for the most part, much more of the gravity and calmness which naturally belong to the style of those who feel that they are standing upon undisputed ground, than of the solicitude or the inflammatory verbosity and turgidness of writers who are labouring to fan a decaying blaze of indefensible enthusiasm.

Or again; it may well be inferred that the modern missionary zeal springs from motives of a substantial and permanent kind, since they affect, without exception, every body of Christians (holding the doctrine of the Reformation) and are felt in precisely the same manner by the Christians of every Protestant community of Europe. And moreover the feeling has not declined, but has sensibly increased since the first years of its activity; and it has endured the trial, in some instances, of severe and long-continued discomfitures, or of very partial success. These are indications of a spring of action far more sedate and enduring than any feverish excitement can ever supply.

But if the extent, and the power, and the promise of the existing missionary zeal are to be duly estimated, the inquirer should visit the

homes of our religious folks; or enter the schools in which their children are trained, and there learn what is the doctrine inculcated upon those who are rising up to take place on the arena of life: or let him listen to the hymns they lisp, and examine the tracts they read, and he will meet the same great principle in a thousand manners enforced, namely—That it is the duty of every Christian, young or old, rich or poor, to take part in sending the Gospel to all nations. Or let the observer notice the "Missionary Box," in the school-room, in the nursery, in the shop-parlour, in the farm-house kitchen, in the cottage, of the religious; and let him mark multiform contrivances for swelling the amount of the revenues of Christian charity, devised, and zealously persisted in, by youths and by little ones, whose parents, at the same age, thought of nothing but of cakes and sports.

And does all this steady movement, this wide-spreading and closely-compacted system of united effort, this mechanism in which infancy as well as maturity takes its part, indicate nothing for futurity? Shall it all have passed away and be forgotten with the present generation? If indeed it were confined to a sect, or to a province, or to a country, it might—though that were unlikely; but not if it be the common style of Christian feeling in every part of the world where fervent Christianity exists at all. Particular associations may be dissolved, and particular schemes may be

broken up; standard-bearers in the sacred cause may faint; the zeal of certain communities may fade; or political disasters may here and there bring ruin upon pious labours; but unless devastation universal sweeps over the face of the civilized world, the doctrine of missionary zeal, which has been broad-cast over Christendom in the present day, will not fail of coming to its harvest. And now if there are any who wish ill to Christianity, let them hasten to prevent the measures of its friends—let them teach their babes to hate the Gospel; for those who love it are taking such means to insure its future triumph as can hardly fail of success, and such as, on all common grounds of calculation, make it likely that even the sons and the daughters of the present race of infidels may be involved in the approaching conquests of the Son of David, and actually join in the loud hosanna that shall announce his accession to the throne of universal empire.

It is then more than barely probable—it is almost certain, that the attempt to offer Christianity to all nations will not presently be abandoned. The next question is this—whether, on grounds of frigid calculation, such attempts are recommended by any fair promise of success.

When the term calculation, is used in reference to the diffusion of Christianity—a use of the word which perhaps may somewhat offend the

ear of piety, an important distinction must be kept in view between that cordial admission of the Gospel which renovates the hearts of men individually, and that change of opinion and profession which may be brought about among a people by means which fall short of possessing efficiency to produce repentance and faith. And while the former must every where — at home or abroad, be the great object aimed at and desired by the Christian ministry, the latter is both in itself—even if nothing more were done, and as a preliminary and probable means conducing to the production of genuine piety, a most desirable and happy revolution. It is moreover a revolution which may be reckoned to lie always within the range of human agency, when skilfully and perseveringly applied. For Christianity is a species of knowledge, in its nature communicable, and, as a system of opinions, or as a code of morals, possesses a manifest superiority when fairly brought into comparison with any existing religious system. And if it may reasonably be asked concerning any people — how shall they believe without a preacher? the converse question might, with little less confidence be put—how shall they not believe with one?

Pagan and Mahommedan nations ought to be thought of by a Christian people just as the master of a numerous household, if he be wise and benevolent, thinks of the untutored members of his family; for though no actual subjection is

owned on the one side, or can be exercised on the other, there exists, virtually, the relationship and the responsibilities of that domination which is ever possessed by knowledge, and intelligence, and virtue, over ignorance and degradation. Now, as the master of a family may, to a greater or less extent, infallibly succeed by zeal, affection, skill, and patience, in dispelling the superstitions and the ignorance which have happened to come under his roof, so, with zeal, affection, skill, and patience, proportioned to the greatness of the work, may the Christian nations at length certainly effect a cleansing of the earth from the cruelties and impurities of polytheism.

Nothing inconsistent with the humblest and most devout dependance upon the divine agency is implied in this supposition, any more than in the belief that our children and servants may be trained in the knowledge of God, and in the decencies of Christian worship. Is there not reason to think that an inattention to this plain principle has prevented, in some measure, the adoption of those vigorous and extended operations, which common sense prescribes as the proper and probable means of diffusing at once civilization and religion through the world?

The probability of a change of religion on the part of an entire people may, it is true, be argued on the adverse as well as on the favourable side, with great appearance of reason. The obstination of the human mind in adhering to the

worse, even when the better is presented to its choice, seems not seldom to possess the invincibility of a physical law; and it has been found as impracticable to reform an absurd usage, as to remodel the national physiognomy. How often have both reason and despotism been baffled in their endeavours to effect even a trivial alteration in ancient usages or costumes; and there has been room to suppose, that the tenacity of life belonging to customs or opinions bears direct proportion always to their absurdity and mischievous consequence. The high antiquity and the still unbroken force of the Asiatic idolatries—in themselves so hideous, so burdensome, and so sanguinary, stand forth as most impressive and appalling confirmations of the truth that whatever has once gained for itself the sanction of time, may boldly defy the assaults of reason. And then, when religious opinions and practices are in question, there is not merely to be broken through the iron law of immemorial usage, but to be encountered the living opposition of the priesthood, already firmly seated in the cloud-girt throne of supposed supernatural power, and interested as deeply as men can be who have at stake their civil existence, and their credit, and their means of luxurious idleness. Again, in most instances, ancient religious opinions send down their roots through the solid structure of the civil institutions of the people;—the old superstition is an oak that was sown by the

builder of the state—has actually pervaded the entire foundations, and forms now the living bond-timber, to remove which would be to bring to the ground the whole tottering masonry of the social system.

When this side of the question has been long and exclusively contemplated, the schemes of missionary zeal may well seem to be utterly chimerical; or if not chimerical—dangerous. But the friends of mankind do not forget that the very same objects may be viewed in another light.—Even before particular facts are appealed to, an hypothesis of an opposite kind may plausibly be advanced.—It may be alleged that Opinion—the invisible power that rules the world, is a name without substance, which, though omnipotent so long as it is thought to be so, vanishes quicker than a mist, when once suspected to be impotent. It might also with great appearance of reason be affirmed as a universal law of the moral world, that the better, when fairly brought into collision with the worse, possesses an infallible certainty of ultimate prevalence.

On this same principle, it is common to affirm, that the improved mechanical processes of a scientific people, will at length necessarily supplant the operose, and wasteful, and inefficient methods practised by half-civilized nations. And thus probably will the ruinous and depopulating usages of despotism, give way before the wealth-

giving maxims of legal government. And thus also may it be hoped that a pure theology, and a pure morality, shall inevitably—if zealously diffused, prevail till they have removed all superstitions with all their corruptions. Even on the lowest principles of natural theology, some such medicative power may be presumed to have been imparted to the human system, as a provision against the progress of utter moral dissolution.

But while an argument of this sort is at issue, the simple method of appealing to such facts as may seem to bear conclusively upon the question, will assuredly not be neglected; and it will be asked whether there are on record any instances which give a peremptory negative to the assertion that a *national* change of religion ought to be thought of as an event in the last degree improbable. — And why should not the spread and triumph of Christianity in the first ages of its promulgation be accepted as an instance absolutely conclusive, and in the fullest sense analogous to the problem that is to be solved? To whatever causes that first prevalence of the religion of the Bible may be attributed, it is still an unquestioned fact that entire nations—not one or two, but many, and in every stage of advancement on the course of civilization, were actually brought to abandon their ancient superstitions, and to profess the Gospel.

These amazing revolutions took place under almost every imaginable variety of circumstances, and they occupied a period of not more than three centuries, and the substantial part of the change had been wrought, to a great extent, before the aid of political succour came in, and even in the front of political opposition. People after people fell away from their idolatries, and assumed—with how much or how little of cordial feeling matters not—the Christian name and code.

Here once more the objector must be urged to select his alternative:—If Christianity won this wide success by aid from heaven, then who will profess to believe that a religion so supported shall not in the end vanquish mankind? Or if not, then, manifestly, the fact of the spread of Christianity in the east, and in the west, in the north, and in the south, destroys altogether the supposed improbability of its again supplanting idolatry.—Nothing inseparable from human nature, nothing invincible stands in the way of the diffusion of our faith among either polished or barbarous polytheists:—for it has already been victorious in both kinds. Let it be affirmed and granted, that the religious infatuations of mankind are firm as adamant; still it is a fact that a hammer harder than adamant once shattered the rock to atoms. And now it is proposed again to smite the same substance with the same instrument; and are those to be deemed irrational

who anticipate the same success? In such an anticipation neither the superior purity and excellence of Christianity need be assumed, nor its truth;—nothing is peremptorily affirmed but its well-attested efficiency to subvert and supplant other religious systems. A myriad of philosophists may clamorously affirm the missionary project to be insane. Nevertheless Christians, listening rather to the history of their religion than to the harangues of its modern oppugners, will go on to preach in every land, "That men should turn from dumb idols to serve the living God."

That during a period of more than a thousand years Christianity should hardly have gained a foot of ground from polytheism, and should in some quarters have been driven in from its ancient frontiers, is only natural, seeing that in the whole course of that time, no extended endeavours, or none guided and impelled by the genuine principles of the Gospel, were made to diffuse it. Angels have no commission to become evangelists, and if men neglect their duty in this instance, no means remain for supplying their lack of service. The modern missionary enterprises (exclusive of some very limited attempts) do not yet date forty years; and while the fact that this spirit of Christian zeal has maintained itself so long attests its solidity, and gives promise of its perpetuity, its recentness—recent compared with the work to be achieved—may

justly be alleged in reply to those who ask (from whatever motive) Why are not the nations converted? Within this short space of time the religious public has been to be formed to a right feeling on the new subject; and all the practical wisdom that belongs to an enterprise so immense and so difficult has been to be acquired; and the agents of the work at home and abroad, to be trained; and the initiatory obstacle—that occasioned by diversity of language, to be removed. The preparatives have now been passed through, and successes obtained large and complete enough to quash all objection, and more than enough to recompense what they have cost. And these successes, moreover, warrant the belief that the universal prevalence of Christianity (considered simply as an exterior profession) is suspended upon the continuance of the missionary zeal among the Christians of Europe and America.

Instead of allowing speculation to flit vaguely and ineptly over all the desolate places of earth's surface, it will be better, if we would make our calculation definite, to fix upon a single region; and while we assume it as probable that the existing spirit of missionary vigilance and assiduity and self-devotion will continue in vigour during the ensuing half-century—endeavour roughly to estimate the chances of the entrance and spread of Christian light in that one region; and let us select the region which may be deemed altogether to occupy the place of an ultimate problem of

evangelical enterprise. Thus announced, every one will of course think of China.

Nothing hardly is more difficult than to view, in the nakedness of mere truth, any object remote from personal observation which has once filled the imagination with images of vastness and mystery. Thus it often happens that benevolent schemes are robbed of their fair chance of success by the fond illusions which are suffered to swell out an empty bulk, so as to hide from view the real difficulties that ought to be deliberately met. And thus is it usual for the timid to amuse their inaction by contemplating spectral forms of danger or obstruction that exist only in the mind. Hindrances and impossibilities may even yield a sort of delight to the imagination by the aspect of greatness and terror they assume;—at least while we resolve to view them only at a distance. And in such cases he must be singularly destitute of poetic feeling, or singularly conscientious and abstinent in the use of language, who, in describing the proposed enterprise, does not impart to the mere facts a form and colouring of unreal greatness and wonder.

This sort of illusiveness and exaggeration unquestionably belongs to the subject of Christian missions to China. Who does not feel that the high numbers of its dense and far-spread population—amounting perhaps to more than a sixth part of the human family, and the yet unpenetrated veil of mystery which hangs over the origin

of the people, and over their actual condition, and even over the geography of the country; and then the singularity of the national character, and the anomalous construction of the language, altogether raise a mist of obscuration which rests in the way of the inquirer who asks—Is the attempt to introduce Christianity among these millions of our brethren utterly vain and visionary?

The natural exaggerations which infest this subject have indeed been sensibly reduced within the last few years: twenty years ago all cautious and sagacious Protestants would have thought themselves bound, in deference to common sense, to deride the idea of converting China to the faith of Europe. What the *De propaganda*, with its store of accommodating measures might attempt, none who must adhere to the guileless methods of Christian instruction would undertake: or even if an enterprise of this sort were commenced, it must be allowed a date of five hundred years for achieving any considerable success. But better information, and the actual accomplishment of the initiatory process, must now, by the least sanguine minds, be deemed greatly to have lessened the improbabilities of such an attempt, and to have shortened the date of our Christian hopes. What has been accomplished of late by the assiduity, and the intellectual vigour, and the moral intrepidity of two or three individuals, has turned the beam of calculation; and it is now rational to talk of that

which, very recently, might not have been named except among visionaries.

The brazen gate of China—sculptured with inscrutable characters, and bolted and barred, as it seemed, against western ingenuity—the gate of its anomalous language has actually been set wide open; and although the ribbon of despotic interdiction is still stretched across the highway that leads to the popular mind, access, to some extent, has been obtained; and who shall affirm that this frail barrier, insurmountable as it may now seem, shall at all times, during another fifty years, exist, and be respected? Within even a much shorter term is it not probable that revolutions of dynasty, or popular commotions, may suspend or divert, for a moment, the vigilance of jealous ignorance? In some such manner it may be supposed that, the means of diffusing religious knowledge being, as they are, accumulated, and headed up above the level of the plains of China, the dam bursting, or falling into decay, the healing flood of Christian truth shall suffuse itself in all directions over the vast surface.

But we are told that the national intellect is spell-bound in a condition of irremediable imbecility. The people, it is said, have no ideas but such as are fixed under the petrifactions of their ancient usages; or even if they had a mind in which ideas might float, they have no medium of communication, or none which can take up even an atom of knowledge or of sentiment that is of

foreign growth. How then shall such a people be converted to Christianity? Were it not as well to attempt to inform and persuade the sculptures of Elephanta, or the glazed images of their own pottery? To all this show of impossibility, a full and sufficient reply is contained in a single affirmation of Scripture—not less philosophically just, than it is beautiful and sublime:—"The Lord looketh from heaven, He beholdeth all the sons of men: from the place of His habitation He looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth:—He fashioneth their hearts alike."

The old doctrine, that there are certain generic and invincible inferiorities of intellect which must for ever bar the advancement of some branches of the human family, has of late received so signal a refutation in the instance of the African race—long and pertinaciously consigned by interested philosophers to perpetual degradation—that it now hardly needs to be argued against. And assuredly, if the negro cranium is found—spite of phrenologists—to admit of mathematical abstraction, fine taste, and fine feeling, it will not be affirmed that the skull of the Tatar or Chinese must necessarily exclude similar excellencies. To assert, either that nature has conferred no physical superiorities, favourable to the developement of mind, on particular races, or to maintain that the comparative disadvantages of some nations are so great and unalterable as to constitute impassable barriers in the way of civilization, is equally a

quackery which history and existing facts condemn, and which nothing but the love of theory or simplification could ever recommend to an intelligent observer of mankind. With the uniform evidence of history before us, it may well be assumed as probable that certain races will always retain the intellectual pre-eminence they have acquired; nor is it at all less reasonable to suppose that every tribe, even the most degraded, is intrinsically capable of whatever is essential to a state of social order and moral dignity.

If the lowest degree of proficiency in the mechanical arts is justly held to give proof of the existence of those powers of abstraction whence, with proper culture, the sciences may take their rise; so, with equal certainty, may we infer a susceptibility of the religious emotions from even the feeblest indications of the moral sense. When a people diffused over so extensive a surface, and so thickly covering that surface, is seen to submit itself intelligently to the patriarchal form of government, which implies the constant and powerful influence of a moral abstraction, and a vivid sense of unseen power, no doubt can remain of its capacity to admit the motives of Christian faith.

The Chinese are what they are, more from the natural consequence of having sustained, during many successive generations, what may be termed, national imprisonment, than from the operation of any physical disabilities. A more complete

and successful interdiction of intercourse with strangers than has been known to take place in any other country; and a closer fitting of the restraints of custom and etiquette upon the manners than has elsewhere been effected, have not failed to impart to the national character that peculiar *gait*—if the phrase may be so used, which must distinguish one who had been released from his swaddling-bands only to be encumbered with a chain, and had worn that chain through life. Of the Chinese people it may truly be said that "the iron hath entered into their soul."

But even without resting upon the probability of the subversion of the existing despotism, the defeat of its jealous precautions may be anticipated as what must at length result from the present course of events. That portion of the Chinese population which may be termed the *extra-mural,* and which, in numbers, exceeds some European nations, may be considered as the depository of the happy destinies of the empire: for these expatriate millions are accessible to instruction, and if once they become, to any considerable extent, alive to religious truth, no prohibitions of paternal despotism will avail to exclude the new principles from the mother country. It is a puerile feeling that would draw discouragement from the comparative diminutiveness and small actual results of the operations that are carrying on for imparting Christianity

to this people. These measures ought, in philosophical justice, to be viewed as the commencements of an accelerative movement, acting incessantly upon an inert mass, which, by the very laws of nature, must at length receive impulse enough to be carried forward in the course of the propelling cause. To be assured of this result, all that we need, is to be assured of the continuance of the spring of movement.

If the several spheres of Missionary labour are reviewed, none, it is presumed, can be deemed to offer more serious obstacles than the one already referred to; or if there be one such, yet have fact and experiment already given a full reply to all objections. May it be permitted to say that a voice from heaven, full of meaning, is heard in the particular character of the successes—how limited soever they may be—which have crowned the incipient attempts to convert the heathen? The veriest reprobates of civilization and social order have been the first to be brought in to grace the triumphs of the Gospel in its recent attempts at foreign conquest; as if at once to solve all doubts, and to refute all cavils relating to the practicability and promise of the enterprise. If it had been thought or affirmed that the stupefaction and induration of heart produced upon a race by ages of uncorrected ferocity and sensuality must repel for ever the attempts of Christian zeal, it is shown, in the instance of the extremest specimens that

could have been selected, that a few years only of beneficent skill and patience are enough to transform the fierce and voluptuous savage into a being of pure, and gentle, and noble sentiments;—that within a few years all the domestic virtues, and even the public virtues—graced with the decencies of rising industry, may occupy the very spots that were reeking with human blood, and the filthiness of every abomination which the sun blushes to behold.

If one islet only of the Southern Ocean had cast away its idols and its horrific customs—if one hamlet only of the Negro or Hottentot race had become Christian, there would have been no more place left on which the objector against missions could rest his cavils; for the problem of the conversion of the heathen would have been satisfactorily solved. But in truth, these happy and amazing revolutions have taken place with such frequency, and under so great a diversity of circumstance, and in front of so many obstacles, that instead of asking whether barbarous nations may be persuaded to forsake their cruel delusions, it may with more propriety be asked—if any thing can prevent the progress of such reforms, universally, where Christian zeal and wisdom perseveringly perform their part.

The relative political and commercial condition of nations at the present moment affords several special grounds of reasoning, on which the extension of Christianity may be anticipated as a

probable event. Among topics of this class may be named that of the diffusion of the English language—the language which beyond comparison with any other is spreading and running through all the earth, and which by the commerce and enterprise of two independent and powerful states, is colonizing the shores of every sea;—this language, now pouring itself over all the waste places of the earth, is the principal medium of Christian truth and feeling, and is rich in every means of Christian instruction, and is fraught with religious sentiment, in all kinds, adapted to the taste of the philosopher, the cottager, and the infant. Almost apart, therefore, from missionary labour, the spread of this language insures the spread of the religion of the Bible. The doctrine is entwined with the language, and can hardly be disjoined. If the two expansive principles of colonization and commercial enterprise, once diffused the language and religion of Greece completely around every sea known to ancient navigation, it is now much more probable that the same principles of diffusion will carry English institutions, and English opinions, into every climate.

But in calculations or speculations of this sort, merely secular as they are, much less is included than truly belongs to the question at issue. Not to assume the truth of Christianity, and not to argue on the ground of its divine excellence, and

not to confide in those prospective declarations, the certainty of which has been attested beyond possibility of doubt, is not only to grope in the dark when we might walk in the light of noon, but to exclude from our calculations the very facts of most significance in its determination. To estimate fairly the probability of the universal triumph of true religion, another method must be pursued, in which the existing condition of the Christian Church is to be contemplated with a Christian feeling. When thus viewed it will appear that a promise of a new kind is now bursting from the bud; and the inference may confidently be drawn that—"summer is nigh."

For the purpose of measuring the progress of religion, attempts have sometimes been made to effect a sort of Christian statistics, or calculation of the actual number of true believers throughout the world. But the propriety of such an application of arithmetic is far from being conspicuous; and seeing that the subject of computation lies confessedly beneath the reach of the human eye, its accuracy may be absolutely denied. Endeavours, again, have been made to judge of the advance or decline of religion by comparing the state of devotional feeling and of morals in the present, and in other times. But all such comparisons must be deemed, at the best, extremely vague, and open to immense errors, arising either from the prepossessions of the individual who makes the comparison, or from the want of data

sufficiently ample and exact; and probably from both.

No attempts of this delusive kind will here be offered to the reader; but instead of them, certain unquestionable and obvious facts will be assumed as affording reasonable ground of very exhilarating hopes.

If any one were required, without premeditation, to give a reply to the question—What is the most prominent circumstance in the present state of the Christian Church—he would, if sufficiently informed on the subject, almost certainly answer—"The honour done to the Scriptures." Such an answer may be supposed as suggested by the conspicuousness of the fact. Now in order to gather our inference safely from this fact, it is necessary to look back for a moment to past times.

In the first and best age of the Church, the deference paid to the inspired writings, whether of prophets or apostles, was as great as can be imagined to exist: and whatever of beneficial influence belongs to the Sacred Volume, was then actually in operation;—or it was so with a single drawback, namely—that arising from the scarcity of the book, and its non-existence in the hands of the Christian commonalty. To estimate duly the greatness of this disadvantage, let it be imagined what would be the effect, among ourselves, of a sudden withdrawment of almost all but the church copies of the Scriptures. This

supposition need not be enlarged upon, for every devotional Christian, and every master of a family feels that, in whatever way the loss might be attempted to be supplied, it would still be afflicting and injurious in the extremest degree.

In the next, and the declining period of church history, if the above-named disadvantage was in some small degree remedied by the multiplication of copies, the benefit was much more than overbalanced by the promulgation and general prevalence of a false, and very pernicious system of exposition;—a system which sheathed the "sword of the Spirit," and scarcely left it its power of penetrating the conscience. The immediate consequence of this abuse of the rule of faith and practice was the rapid growth of a thousand corruptions. Thus, while in lip and in ceremonial the Scriptures held their seat of reverence, they were dislodged from the throne of power.

A night of a thousand years succeeded, during which the witnesses of God lay in their tomb—literally and virtually, hidden, and silenced, and degraded.

The Reformation was, in all senses, a resurrection of the Bible;—its recovery and restoration as an ancient document;—the recognition of its authority as the word of God;—the discovery of its meaning as a rule of faith and worship, and life; and its new diffusion through the Christian body. The restoration of the Scriptures to their place of power and honour brought with it a

revival of true piety, scarcely, if at all, inferior in extent and fervency to that which attended the preaching of the apostles. There were however deductions from the full influence and permanent benefit that might have resulted from this recovery of the sacred canon. Of these deductions the first, was the limited and imperfect diffusion of copies; for though the publication of the Bible by means of the press was actually great, it fell very far short of being complete. The next deduction arose from the infant state of the science of biblical criticism; the next, from the still unbróken influence of scholastic systems and modes of expression, which spread a dense and colouring medium over the lucidness of the apostolic style; the next, and the most considerable and pernicious of these drawbacks arose from the acrimony of controversy, and from that spirit of contumacious scrupulosity which is the parent of schism.

These imperfections were great enough to bar the progress of Christianity, and to sully its glory at the time, and to procure the speedy decline of piety in all the Protestant countries. But when the present aspect of the Church is compared with its condition at the era of the Reformation, several circumstances connected with the state of the Scriptures, offer themselves to observation, that are decidedly in favour of our times, and such as seem pregnant with hope for the future. Of these the first, is the unex-

ampled multiplication and diffusion of the Sacred Volume:—The second, is the progress made towards bringing the original text to a state of undisputed purity, and the advancement of the science of biblical criticism, by which means the verbal meaning of the inspired writers is now ascertained more satisfactorily than at any time since the apostolic age:—And the third, is the incipient adoption of an improved method of exposition; attended by an increasing disposition to bow to the Bible, as the only arbiter in matters of religion. It remains then briefly to point out in what manner these auspicious circumstances support the hope of an approaching revival of genuine religion.

For the first of them, namely, the multiplication and diffusion of the Sacred Volume.—

Whenever the true and the false in matters of religion are brought into conflict, two things are necessary to secure the triumph of the better side, namely, in the first place, that the sound opinion should be set forth in a perspicuous and convincing manner; and then, that it should be borne forwards over the resistances of antiquated prejudice, and worldly interest, and secular power, by the momentum of public feeling. It is not the single preaching even of an archangel, that could effect the renovation of the church when it really needs to be brought back to purity and health. All the logic of heaven would die unheeded on the ear, unless re-echoed from the

multitude. Now if it may for a moment be assumed, that a general rectification of doctrine and practice, and a revival of primitive piety is actually about to take place, what is that preliminary measure which might be anticipated as the necessary means of giving irresistible force, and universal spread to such a reformation?—What but the placing of the sacred canon, the arbiter of all dispute, and the fountain of all motive, previously in the hands of the people of every country? If, in the coming era, the teachers of religion are to insist upon its doctrines and duties with new force and clearness, their success must be expected to bear proportion to the existence of scriptural knowledge, or to the means of acquiring it, among those whom they address.

An extraordinary excitement of religious feeling, arising *previously* to the general circulation of the Scriptures, can hardly be imagined to take so prosperous and safe a course, as it would, if it *followed* that circulation. So far as a conjecture on the methods of divine procedure may be hazarded, it must be believed that the extensive dissemination of the Scriptures which has of late been carrying on, and which is still in active progress, in all those parts of the world that are accessible to Christian zeal, is a precursive measure, soon to be followed by that happy revolution of which it gives so intelligible an augury.

Let it be said, and perhaps it may be said with some truth, that the actual religious impression

hitherto produced by the copious issuing of Bibles among the common people in our own and other countries, is less remarkable than might have been anticipated; then, with so much the more confidence may the belief be entertained that this extraordinary publication of the will of God to man is, on the part of Him who overrules all events for the furtherance of his gracious designs, altogether a *prospective* measure, and that the special intention of these many translations, and of these countless reprints of the Bible, is yet to be developed.

Is there much of gratuitous assumption, or of unwarrantable speculation in picturing the present position of mankind in some such manner as the following?—During a long course of ages a controversy, managed with various success, has been carried on here and there in the world, on the great questions of immortality, and of the liability of man to future punishment, as the transgressor of the divine law;—and concerning the terms of reconciliation.—Hitherto, there has stood, on the affirmative, or religious side of this controversy, only a small and scattered party; while on the other side, there has remained, with more or less of active hostility, the great majority of mankind, who have chosen to pursue exclusively the interests of the present life, as if no doctrine of immortality had been credibly announced; and have dared the future displeasure of the Most High; and have ventured the loss of

endless happiness; and have spurned the conditions of pardon. But it is imagined that now, events of a new order are to bring this momentous controversy to a final crisis.—Yet before the moment of awful decision comes on, and while all minds remain in the listlessness of the ancient apathy, and while the winds of high commotion lie hushed in the caverns of divine restraint,—in this season of portentous tranquillity, those writings, upon the authority of which the issue is to turn, are put into every hand: and although the hands that receive them, seem now to hold the book with a careless grasp, ere long an alarm shall be sounded through all nations; all shall be roused from their spiritual sleep, and shall awake to feel that the interests of an endless life are in suspense: then shall it appear for what purpose the Bible has first been delivered to every people.

These views, it is granted, are in part conjectural; and yet, who that entertains a belief of the providential guidance of the Christian Church, can suppose that the most remarkable course of events that has hitherto ever marked the history of the Scriptures, is not charged with the accomplishment of some unusual revolution; and what revolution less than the instalment of the Inspired Volume in the throne of universal authority, can be thought of, as the probable result of the work that is now carrying forwards? If the prejudices of the sceptical spirit, which, in some degree,

blind even the most devout, were removed, every eye accustomed to penetrate futurity, would see in the recent diffusion of the Sacred Writings an indubitable sign of their approaching triumph over all forms of impiety and false religion.

The friends of Bible Societies might on this ground, find a motive for activity, proof against all discouragement. When missionary efforts meet disappointment—when accomplished teachers are removed in quick succession by death—when stations where much toil has been expended are abandoned—when converts fall away from their profession, the whole fruit of zeal perishes: but it is otherwise in the work of translating and of multiplying the Scriptures; for although these endeavours should at first be rejected by those for whose benefit they are designed;—still, what has been done is not lost;—the seed sown may spring up, even after a century of winter. Even if the existing Bible Societies, at home and abroad, should do nothing more than accomplish the initiative labours of translation, and should spend their revenues in filling their warehouses with an undemanded stock of Bibles, they would almost insure the universal diffusion of true religion in the ensuing age. Immediate success is doubtless to be coveted; but though this should be withheld, the work of translation and of printing is pregnant with an infallible promise.

The restoration of the Sacred Text to a state of almost undisputed purity — the accumulation of the resources of biblical criticism, and the great advances that have been made in the business of ascertaining the grammatical sense of the inspired writers, are circumstances in a very high degree conducive to the expected prevalence of genuine religion. Both infidelity and heresy have, till of late, found harbourage in the supposed or pretended corruption or uncertainty of the canon. And the whole of those small successes, which have served, from time to time, to keep alive the flickering hopes of heterodoxy, have been drawn from the detection of petty faults in the vulgar text. There was a season when some even of the champions of orthodoxy became infected with unwarrantable fears and suspicions on this ground. But the utmost depth of the ἑλκος has been probed. The most sanguine sceptic can henceforward hardly hope to derive any new or important advantages from this source. The text of the Scriptures is now in a state more satisfactory than that of any other ancient writings; and though impudence and ignorance go on to prate as they were wont, no theologian, who would not forfeit his reputation as a scholar and a man of sense, dares to insist upon objections which some years ago were thought to be of the most formidable kind.

It is remarkable that this work of purgation and restoration which, like that of the translation

and diffusion of the Scriptures, is manifestly of a preliminary kind, should have been completed at this precise moment. Had these doubts and suspicions remained unexamined and unsettled, they might greatly have checked the progress of a future religious revival; they might have given birth to new heresies, vigorous from the enhanced tone of general feeling; they might have shaken the minds of the faithful, and have distracted the attention of the ministers of religion. But this preparatory work is done; and so fully have the holds of sceptical doctrine been searched into, and so thoroughly has the invalidity of its pleas been exposed, that nothing is now wanted but an energetic movement of the public mind to shake off for ever all its withering sophisms.

It is not as if even the most faulty translation of the Scriptures, or one made from the most defective text, would not abundantly convey all necessary religious truth; or, as if Christian doctrine and practice were, to any great extent, dependent upon philological exactitude of any kind. But in removing occasions for the cavils and insinuations of captious or timid spirits, the literary restoration of the Bible, and the abundant means of ascertaining the grammatical sense of its phrases, is highly important. And in looking towards the future, it must be regarded as a circumstance of peculiar significance that the documents of our faith have just passed through the severest possible ordeal of hostile criticism, at

the very moment when they are in course of delivery to all nations.

The recent progress made towards the adoption of an improved method of exposition demands to be named amongst the most auspicious indications of the present times. Insensibly, and undesignedly, and from the operation of various causes, all well-intentioned theologians have of late been fast advancing towards that simple and rational method of inferring the doctrine of Scripture which corresponds with the inductive method of inquiry, practised in the pursuit of physical science. Just as, in the ancient schools of philosophy, each pretended expounder of the mysteries of nature, first framed his theory, and then imposed upon all phenomena such an interpretation as would best accord with his hypothesis, so have biblical expositors, in long succession, from the ancient Jewish doctors, to the Christian divines of the last century, with very few exceptions, followed the method of interpreting each separate portion of Scripture by the aid of a previously formed theological hypothesis. And although these theories of divinity have been, perhaps, fairly founded upon scriptural evidence, partially obtained, they have often exerted an influence scarcely less blinding and pernicious than as if they had been altogether erroneous. The system once admitted to constitute a synopsis of truth, has been suffered

to exercise the most arrogant domination over every part of Scripture in detail. Certain dogmas, awfully clothed in the clouds of metaphysical phraseology, have bid defiance to the most explicit evidence of an opposite meaning; and no text has been permitted to utter its testimony till it had been placed on the rack.

But the folly and impiety of this style of interpretation have become conspicuous; and though not yet quite abandoned, it is left to those whose minds have been too long habituated to trammels to move at all without them. The rule of the new mode of exposition is founded on a principle precisely analogous to that which forms the basis of the inductive method of inquiry in physical science. In these sciences it is now universally admitted, that, at the best, and after all possible diligence and sagacity have been employed, we can scarcely penetrate beyond the exterior movements of the material system; while the interior mechanism of nature still defies human scrutiny. Nothing then could be more preposterous than to commence the study of nature by laying down, theoretically, the plan of those hidden and central contrivances, as if they were open to observation, and then to work outwards from that centre, and to explain all facts that come under observation in conformity with the principles so ignorantly assumed. This is indeed to take a lie in our right hand, as the key of knowledge: yet such was the philosophy which ruled the world for ages.

The method of hypothetical interpretation is, if possible, more absurd in theology than in natural science. Every mind, not infatuated by intellectual vanity, must admit that it is only some few necessary points of knowledge, relating to the constitution and movements of the infinite and spiritual world, that can be made the matter of revelation to mankind: and these must be offered in detached portions, apart from their symmetry. Meanwhile the vast interior — the immeasurable whole, is not merely *concealed*, but is in itself strictly incomprehensible by human faculties. Metaphysical projections of the moral system, how neat soever, and entire, and plausible they may seem, can have no place in what deserves to be called a rational theology. We not only do not know, but we could not learn, the very things which the framer of a pretended scientific divinity professes to spread forth in all their due proportions on his charts of the upper world.

The mode in which the necessarily incomplete revelation of that upper world is conveyed in the Scriptures, is perfectly in harmony with that in which the phenomena of nature offer themselves to our notice. The sum or amount of divine knowledge really intended to be conveyed to us, has been broken up and scattered over a various surface; it has been half-hidden, and half-displayed; it has been couched beneath hasty and incidental allusions; it has been doled out in

morsels and in atoms. There are no logical synopses in the Bible; there are no scientific presentations of the body of divinity; no comprehensive digests; such would have been, not only unsuited to popular taste and comprehension, but actually impracticable; since they must have contained that which neither the mind of man can receive, nor his language embody. Better far might a seraph attempt to convey the largeness of his celestial ideas to a child, than God impart a systematic revelation to man. On the contrary, it is almost as if the vessel of divine philosophy had been wrecked and broken in a distant storm, and as if the fragments only had come drifting upon our world, which, like an islet in the ocean of eternity, has drawn to itself what might be floating near its shores.

The abrupt and illogical style of oriental composition, and in some instances, the characteristic simplicity of untutored minds, are to be regarded as the appropriate means chosen for imparting to mankind such loose particles of religious truth as it was necessary for them to receive. This inartificial vehicle was, of all others, the one best adapted to the conveyance of a revelation, necessarily imperfect and partial.

Now it is manifest that the mode of exposition must be conformed to the style of the document; and this conformity demands that the inductive method, invariably, should be used for gleaning the sense of Scripture. While employing all the

common and well-known means proper for ascertaining the grammatical sense of ancient writers, each single passage of the Inspired Volume, like a single phenomenon of nature, is to be interrogated for its evidence, without any solicitude for the fate of a preconceived theory, and without asking — how is this evidence to be reconciled with that derived from other quarters: for it is remembered that the revelation we are studying is a partial discovery of facts, which could not be more than imperfectly made known. Whoever has not yet fully satisfied himself that the Scriptures, throughout, were "given by inspiration of God," should lose no time in determining that doubt: but if it be determined, then it is a flagrant inconsistency not to confide in the principle that the Bible is every where truly consistent with itself, whether or not we have the means of tracing its agreements. And while this principle is adhered to, no sentiment or fact plainly contained in the words, need be refused or contorted on account of its apparent incongruity with systematic divinity.

In this manner only is it possible that the whole amount of religious knowledge intended to be imparted by the Scriptures can be gathered from them. It must be granted as not only probable, but certain, that whatever relates to infinity — to the divine nature — to the ultimate purposes of the divine government — to the unseen worlds — and to the future state, and even to the mechanism of motives, must offer itself to the human under-

standing in a form beset with difficulties. That this must actually be the case might be demonstrated to a mathematical certainty. If therefore we resolve to receive from the Inspired Writers nothing but what we can reconcile, first with certain abstruse notions, and then with a particular interpretation of other passages, the consequence is inevitable—that we obtain a theology, needlessly limited, if not erroneous.

It may fairly be supposed that there are treasures of divine knowledge yet latent beneath the surface of the Scriptures, which the practice of scholastic exposition, so long adhered to, on all sides, has locked up from the use of the Church; and it may be hoped, that when that method has fallen completely into disuse, and when the simple and humble style of inductive interpretation is better understood, and more constantly resorted to than at present, and when the necessary imperfection and incoherency of all human knowledge of divine things is fully recognized, and when the vain attempt to fashion a miniature model of the spiritual universe is for ever abandoned, and when whatever the Inspired Writers either explicitly affirm, or obscurely intimate, is embraced in simplicity of heart, that then the boundaries of our prospect of the hidden and the future world may be vastly enlarged. Nor is this all;—for in the same manner the occasions of controversy will be almost entirely removed; and though smaller differences of opinion may remain,

it will be seen by all to be flagrantly absurd to assume such inconsiderable diversities as the pretexts of dissension and separation.

No one cordially reverencing the Bible, and believing it to be given by inspiration of God—who is "not the author of confusion, but of order," can imagine it to have been so worded and constructed as to *necessitate* important diversities of interpretation among those who humbly and diligently labour to obtain its meaning. Nor will any but the most absurd bigots deny that with those who differ from themselves, there may be found diligence and sincerity quite equal to their own. What account then is to be given of those contrarieties of opinion which continue to sully the glory of the Christian Church, and to deprive it almost entirely of its expansive energy?

In endeavouring to give a satisfactory reply to this important question, we are, of course, entitled to dismiss from the discussion, first, all those errors of doctrine which spring immediately from the prepossessions of proud and unholy minds, and which are not to be refuted until such evil dispositions are rectified. It is not a better exposition of Scripture merely that will afford an efficient remedy for such false opinions. In the next place it is proper to put out of the question all those politico-religious divisions which, as they originated in accidents, so now rest for their maintenance, much less upon reason, than upon

the authority of habit, and the pertinacity of party feeling, or perhaps even upon motives of secular interest. All such causes of schism must give way and be scattered to the winds whenever the authority of the divine injunctions to peace, and union, and mutual forbearance, are forcibly felt.

There should moreover be dismissed from the question those differences that have arisen in the Church on some special points of antiquarian obscurity:—these, having been in a past age absurdly lifted into importance by an exaggerated notion of the right and duty of Christians to stickle upon their individual opinions, even at the cost of the great law of love, are now pretty generally felt by men of sense and right feeling, to be heir-looms of shame and disadvantage to whoever holds them. A very probable return to good sense and piety is all that is needed to get rid for ever of such disputes. If the utmost endeavours of competent and honest men, on both sides, have not availed to put certain questions of ancient usage beyond doubt; then it is manifest that such points belong not to the fundamentals of faith or practice, and therefore can never afford ground of justifiable separation, nor should the Christian commonalty be encouraged to suppose that the solemnities of conscience are implicated in the decision of questions which, even the most learned, cannot in fact decide. What less than a grievous injury to

right feelings can ensue from the popular belief that the manifold evils of religious dissension are mischiefs of small moment, compared with the breach of some niceties of ceremonial? Shall Christianity spread in the world, and show itself glorious, while egregious practical absurdities like these are persisted in?—assuredly not. But there is reason to believe, even in spite of the fixedness of some unsocial spirits, that the date of schism is nearly expired, and that a better understanding of the great law of Christ will ere long bring all his true followers into the same fold.

When the deductions named above have been made, the remaining differences that exist among the pious are only such as may fairly be attributed to the influence of the old theoretic system of interpretation; and they are such as must presently disappear when the rule of INDUCTIVE EXPOSITION shall be thoroughly understood and generally practised. The hope therefore of an approaching prosperous era in the church depends, in great measure, upon the probability of a cordial return to the authority of Scripture—of Scripture unshackled by hypothesis. This return alone can remove the misunderstandings which have parted the body of Christ; and it is the reunion of the faithful that must usher in better times.

That a torn Church should be eminently prosperous—that it should be favoured as the instru-

ment of diffusing the Gospel with triumphant success, and on a large scale, among the nations, cannot be imagined; for doubtless the Head of the Church holds the most emphatic of his admonitions in higher esteem than that he should easily brook the breach and contempt of it, and put extraordinary honour upon those who seem to love their particular opinions more than His commandment.

Even without laying any great stress upon that softening of party prejudices which has of late actually taken place, (though in fact conciliation is advanced very far) the hope of a near termination of controversy, and of the healing of all permanent differences among true Christians, may still rest on solid ground. An intelligent faith in the divine origination of the Scriptures contains *necessarily* a belief in their power to bring the Catholic Church into a state of unity, so that division should no more be thought of. That, during so many ages this has not been the condition of the Christian body, is satisfactorily to be attributed to causes which are by no means of inevitable perpetuity: but which, on the contrary, seem now to be approaching their last stage of feeble existence. Meanwhile the Oracles of God are visibly ascending to the zenith of their rightful power. The necessary preparations for their instalment in the place of undisputed authority are completed; and nothing is waited for but a movement of general feeling, to give them

such influence as shall bear down whatever now obstructs the universal communion of the faithful.

An expectation of this sort will, of course, be spurned by those (if there are any such) who, were they deprived of their darling sectarianism, and robbed of their sinister preferences, would scarcely care at all for Christianity, and to whom the idea of Catholic Christianity, if they can admit such an idea, is a cold abstraction. And it will be rejected also by those who, though their feelings are Christian, accustom themselves to look at the state of religion always with a secular eye, and are indisposed to admit any suppositions that are not obtruded upon them by immediate matter of fact. To all such persons the existing obstacles that stand in the way of Church union must seem utterly insurmountable, and the hope of an annihilation of party distinctions, altogether chimerical. But it is not to such minds that the appeal is to be made when futurity is in question; for such are always slaves of the past, and of the present, and are destined to stand by, and wonder, and cavil, while happy revolutions are in progress; and it is only when resistance to the course of things becomes impracticable that they are dragged on reluctantly, more like captives than attendants, upon the triumphant march of truth.

This assuredly may be asserted, that so far as human agency can operate to bring on a better era to the Church, he who despairs of it, hinders

it, to the extent of his influence; while he who expects it, hastens it, so far as it may be accelerated. This difference of feeling might even be assumed as furnishing a test of character, and it might be affirmed that when the question of the probable revival and spread of Christianity is freely agitated, those who embrace the affirmative side are (with few exceptions) the persons whose temper of mind is the most in harmony with the expected happy revolution, and who would, with the greatest readiness, act their parts in the new and better economy; while on the contrary, those who contentedly or despondingly give a long date to existing imperfections and corruptions, may fairly be suspected of loving "the things that are" too well.

There is yet another line of argument, wholly independent of the two that have been pursued above, in which the general spread of true religion might be made to appear an event probably not very remote—namely, the argument from prophecy. But besides that the subject is by far too large and serious to be treated hastily, the time is not arrived in which it might be discussed with the calmness it demands. Yet in passing this subject it may be suggested to those who, notwithstanding that they admit the truth of Christianity, constantly deride genuine piety whenever it comes in their way, that though the apparent course of events seems to indicate a gradual improvement, such as would give time to

oppugners to choose the wiser part, and to range themselves quietly in the train of the conquering religion, the general tenor of scriptural predictions holds out a different prospect, and gives great reason to suppose that the final triumph of the Gospel is to be ushered in by some sudden and vindictive visitation, which shall arrest impiety in its full career, and deny for ever to the then impenitent the option of making a better choice.

THE END.